Jameel Kermalli

CONCENTRATION IN PRAYER



25 Ways To Be More Effective And Attentive In Your Prayer

30-Day Workbook Included

Concentration in Prayer

25 STRATEGIES

and

30-DAY WORKBOOK

INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Praise is to Allah (SWT), The Lord of The Universe!
In His Name, The Most Beneficent, The Most Merciful!

CONCENTRATION IN PRAYER was written over a few years and significant research went into completing this project. The main goal of this book is to educate The Muslims of the importance of The Five Daily Prayer and to explain **HOW** to create, develop and maintain concentration in Prayer. This is an important aspect of Prayer since Allah (SWT) only requires our undiminished attention during Prayer.

This book on Prayer requires active reading and active participation. Interested readers will find wealth of information, research and exercises one can effectively employ to reap the fruits of the Prayer. It is envisaged that the reader, in particular the youth and leaders of tomorrow, will look up to this book and apply its recommendations on a daily basis. It is definitely not a once-read book! Charts and diagrams have been provided to aid the reader in understanding the nature of this book.

Even though the book quotes many sources, it is sometimes unable to provide specific citing and references because the collection of the traditions in this book began a few years ago. Suffice it to say that the traditions quoted are authentic and form reliable sources. With the help and assistance of learned scholars, the like of my father – Yusuf Kermalli, Ma'alim Muhsin Alidina, Ma'alim Mohamed Raza Dungersi, and a few close friends, this project was recently completed. Once again, I would also like to thank my parents who have provided their unlimited love and support in the production of this book. And finally, my wife and two lovely children that God has blessed me with, for their patience and confidence throughout the write-up and production of this book.

The Chapter of al-Fatiha is requested for the benefit of the soul of my mother and the souls of all believers who have already made their journey into the next world.

Jameel Kermalli

FOREWORD

This book discusses the importance of The Five Daily Prayer and it's status with Allah (SWT). The work also discusses strategies you can employ to develop and maintain a high level of attention and concentration whilst communicating with Allah (SWT), Who demands that His servants be most attentive in their Prayer, more than any other worship. He, The Creator and Designer of The Universe, remarks to that individual, who says his Prayer with least attention, alertness of mind and concentration:

> O' Liar! Do you want to deceive Me? I swear by My Splendor and Majesty that I will deprive you the pleasure of your invocations and enjoyment of personal communications with Me.
> *(Hadith al-Qudsi)*

Jameel Kermalli has done painstaking research and has shared his findings with us in a lucid, readable manner.

Muhsin Alidina

IMPORTANT NOTE

The 30-Day Workout is a complete exercise to develop attention and concentration in Prayer. For those individuals requiring assistance, you may contact the author personally at jameelyk@aol.com

Anyone who completes the 30-Day Workout with all the forms filled out, the author will appreciate if the results and outcomes are sent to him and they can be analyzed. The outcomes of this workout will be published, Insha Allah, in an Islamic Journal.

AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Jameel Kermalli is a graduate of the University of Southampton, UK with a Bachelors of Science (Hons.) degree in Psychology, majoring in Health Psychology. He is also a Board Certified Psychotherapist and a Board Certified Biofeedback Practitioner, specializing in EEG Biofeedback. His Doctorate is in Naturopathic Medicine and his areas of specialty include Homeopathic, Nutritional and Herbal Medicines. Jameel is also a Board Certified Nutritional Consultant.

He graduated on top of his class from al-Hussaini Madressa in Dar es Salaam and is a teacher in Islamic studies.

He has his own private practice in Long Island, New York.

Jameel is also part of the team that has developed The Hajj Board Game, the first of its kind, due for release very soon. The Hajj Board Game, resembling monopoly, summarizes The Pilgrimage to The House of Allah, combining education, relaxation and mystery. The Game is

Hajj and those who have not yet been blessed to undertake this sacred

2 dices with 1 spot, 2 spots and blank, a timer; 4 playing items, 90 A cards, 90 B cards, 90 C cards, 90 D cards, 90 multiple choice cards, and 90 pick up and beware cards.

Jameel is also the author of a highly researched book, **The Truth About**

which is under preparation. This book is a scientific work relating to the Concept of Energy in The Universe, its Intelligence, and how Islamic beliefs and practices accord totally with known scientific and modern discoveries.

Contents

CONCENTRATION IN PRAYER



Importance Of Prayer

Imam al-Sadiq (AS) narrates that it is written in The Torah:

"O' Son of Man, if you EMPTY yourself, i.e. disengage yourself from all other pre-occupations to make yourself available for My worship, I will fill your heart with richness and I will not abandon you to what you seek and long for. And it will be upon Me to close the door of poverty upon you and to fill your heart with awe for Me.

And if you don't empty yourself for My worship, I will fill your heart with preoccupation with the world. I will not close upon you the door of poverty and will abandon you to what you seek."

(al-Kulayni (RA), Usul al-Kafi,2, "Kitab al-'Iman wa1-Kufr', "Bab al-'Ibadah", Tradition number 1)

IMPORTANCE OF PRAYER

Prayer is the most effective way of spiritual migration towards Allah (SWT) and attaining the exalted position of His nearness. When al-Sadiq (AS) was asked what was the best deed that brings human beings close to Allah (SWT) and is also liked by Him? He replied:

> After enlightenment of God's Essence, I do not know anything better than The Prayer. The most esteemed and favorite deed before Allah (SWT) is Prayer. Prayer is the last dying will of all Prophets (AS).
>
> How good it is that a human being takes a bath or performs ablution, then retires into a secluded corner where he is not seen by anyone, and has the honor of performing genuflection and prostration. When a servant bows himself down into prostration and prolongs it, then Shaytan says, *'O', Woe Upon Me! This servant has obeyed Allah (SWT), while I transgressed, and he has offered prostration that I refused'.*

In *Falah al-Sail Page 23, Chapter 2, On the Description of The Prayer,* on the authority of al-Sayyid 'Ali ibn Tawus (RA), al-Sadiq (AS) said:

> The Prayer will not be complete except for the one who has full purity and a mature completeness, and is away from temptation and deviation. He knows Allah (SWT) and so stands before Him, submits to Him and persists. He thus, stands between despair and hope, between patience and worry, as if the promises to him have been fulfilled, and the threats upon him have transpired, lowering his fame and manifesting his aim.

> He sacrifices for Allah (SWT) his soul, treads upon the road to Him as his goal willingly. He severs the relations of interest for the sake of The One to Whom he bounds and comes, and from Whom he seeks help. Should he achieve all these, The Prayer would be of the ordered type and of the informed about, and it is the very Prayer which forbids evil and vice.

In *Mustadrak al-Wasa'il, Book of The Prayer,* Muhammad, son of Ya'qub (RA), quotes al-Sajjad (AS) as having said:

> As regards the rights of The Prayer, you are to know that it is a visit to Allah (SWT) and that in it you are standing before Him. If you realized that, you would deserve to be, through it, in the position of a slave who is humble, desirous, horrified, frightened, hopeful, distressed, and imploring. He is also glorifying the state of The One in front of Whom he stands with complete stillness, solemnity, submission of the limbs, humility, well supplicating to Him for himself, requesting Him to free his neck, which is encircled by his faults and consumed by his sins. And there is no power except by Allah (SWT).

THE REALITY OF PRAYER

Saying your Prayer on time is a highly recommended act, and none other than Allah (SWT) reminds us of this obligation:

> And when he (the worshipper) knows that it is time of Prayer and he does not pray, he is indeed careless about Me.
> (Hadith al-Qudsi)

In *Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, vol. 3, Page 90*, al-Sadiq (AS) is reported to have said:

> Whoever performed the obligatory Prayer at the beginning of their times and observed their restrictions, the angels would raise them white and pure into heaven. The Prayer would say (to the performer): *'May Allah (SWT) preserve you as you preserved me and entrusted me to a generous angel'*.
>
> But whoever performed them after the appointed times with no excuse, and did not observe their restrictions, the angels would raise them, black and dark. The Prayer would shout at the performer: *'You have lost me, may Allah (SWT) lose you, and may He not care for you as you*

> *did not care for me'*.

Prayer has several built in properties that make the worshipper far better than the angels and makes life worth living. Only when the true reality of Prayer is understood then one is awestruck by its daily performance. In explaining the true nature of Prayer, al-Ridha (AS) comments:

> The reason for Prayer is that it is the acknowledgment of The Lordship of Allah (SWT) and negating all kinds of partners and plurality for Him. Prayer is standing before The Omnipotent, with humility, humbleness and confession (of sins), and begging forgiveness of the previous sins. Prayer is placing the face on dust five times a day as (a sign of) recognition and confession of His Greatness.
>
> Prayer is for remembering Him and keeping away from arrogance and negligence. Prayer leads to humility, submission and humbleness towards Allah (SWT), and the enthusiasm for the desire to material and spiritual progress (both in this world and the hereafter).
>
> Moreover, Prayer enables a person to constantly engage in remembering Allah (SWT), both day and night, so as not to forget one's Lord, Master and Creator, since forgetting will cause rebellion. Man, while offering Prayer, stays in the presence of His Lord and in the state of His remembrance, and this very condition constrains and stops him from sins and many kinds of corruption.

In order for you to be part of manifestation of the authority of Allah (SWT) on this earth, you must pledge complete submission, bondage and servitude to The Lord of the Worlds. You must manifest all this in your behavior, in general, by remembering Allah (SWT) at all times and seeking His Will and specifically, by performing the ritual acts of worship e.g. giving alms, fast, etc.

Scholars have noted that if a man does not fulfill the conditions of this act of Prayer, he defies Allah (SWT) becoming a rebel and a devil. For man to climb higher in the realm of existence, he must lower himself to Allah (SWT). The more he lowers himself to Allah (SWT), the higher he reaches in the realm of existence.

It has been the practice of Allah (SWT) to conceal important grace to mankind, and Prayer is no exception. S. V. Mir Ahmad 'Ali (RA), in his *Commentary of The Qur'an,* narrates seven values that have been kept concealed by Allah (SWT), The Most High:

> According to some reports, The Night of Power (Qadr) is concealed in the year as a whole. This is because man may ever seek His grace

every night as much as he possibly can. Similarly, one of these several nights in the months of Sha'ban and Ramadhan are said be The Night of Qadr, The Night of Grandeur.

The Greatest Name of Allah (SWT), with which one could have everything he desires, is concealed in several names, so that one may remember and recite all the Divine Names of The Lord.

The Prayer a*l-Wusta* or the Middle one of the prescribed Daily Prayer is kept concealed in The Five Daily Prayer so that one may offer every one of them with eagerness to earn its special reward.

In one particular hour of Friday, every week, it is said, the prayer is heard without fail. However, the hour is not disclosed particularly so that one may engage in Prayer the whole day as much as he can.

God's pleasure is concealed in Prayer so that one may always worship The Lord.

The displeasure of The Lord is mentioned to be in sinning in general so that man may abstain from all kinds of sinning.

The most honorable with Allah (SWT) is the most pious, so that one may acquire piety for himself and seek the friendship of the most honorable ones with The Lord; love the pious and the righteous one, hate impiety, and stay away from disobedience.

The Prophet (S) in his last remaining hours of life further advised his followers to take Prayer seriously, and pray according to what has been prescribed upon them.

THE VALUE OF PRAYER

Allah (SWT) manifests Himself to His perfect friends in a kind manner, and the attraction of love becomes their guide. As the tradition says that The Prophet of Allah (S) used to be waiting for the time of the Prayer, his longing ever increasing, until at last he would say to Bilal (The Prophet's Caller to Prayer): *'Relieve us, O' Bilal'*.
(a*l-Mahajjat al-Bayda fi Tahdhib al-Ahya vol. 1, Page 377)*

In advising Abu Dhar (RA), The Prophet (S) says:

O' Abu Dhar! Allah (SWT), Glorious is His Praise, has made the pleasure of my eye in (daily) Prayer, and has made me love Prayer like food is made lovable to the hungry and water to the thirsty. And surely, while the hungry one, when he eats is satiated, and the thirsty one, when he drinks he is quenched; I am not satiated from Prayer.

O' Abu Dhar! Anyone who voluntarily prays 12 units of Prayer, other than the obligatory, he has earned the right to a House in Paradise.

O' Abu Dhar! Surely, so long as you are in Prayer, you are knocking on the door of The Great King, and whoever knocks long on the door of The King it will be opened for him.

O' Abu Dhar! There is no believer that stands in Prayer but falls on him goodness onto what is between him and The Throne. And, an angel is appointed for him that calls out, *'O' Son of Adam (AS), if you knew what there is for you in Prayer and whom you are calling, you would not turn away'*.

O' Abu Dhar! Be like him, who in a deserted place (though alone), calls Adhan and Iqamah (Call for Prayer) and says his Prayer. So your Lord says to the angels, *'Look at My servant! He is praying and no one sees him but Me?'* Then descend 70,000 Angels and pray behind him and seek forgiveness for him until the next day. And a man who stands in the midst of night and prays alone, prostrates, and falls asleep while prostrating, Allah (SWT) says, *'Look at My servant! His soul is with me and his body is in prostration; and (be like) a man who is in a war and all his companions flee, but he stays firm fighting until he is killed'*.

O' Abu Dhar! No man puts his forehead (in prostration) in any place on earth but that place bears witness of that for him on The Day of Judgment. There is no place that a group of people visit but that it starts either sending salutation on them, or cursing them.

O' Abu Dhar! Do you know the reason behind revelation of the verse: *'Be patient, exhort others to be patient, establish Prayer, and fear Allah that you may be successful?'* I said, '*I don't know - May my father and mother be sacrificed for you*'. The Prophet (S) said, '*For waiting for the next Prayer after every Prayer*'.



PRAYER AND THE DAY OF JUDGMENT

On The Day of Judgment, before one is even permitted to present the good deeds that he has performed in this world, the first question asked will relate to Prayer and only then will he be allowed to proceed. The Prophet (S) has made this clear by saying:

> All good deeds depend on Prayer. Prayer is the cornerstone of Islam. If Prayer is accepted then the good deeds will be accepted. If Prayer is not accepted, then the good works will not be accepted.

This proclamation becomes clear when we examine Shaykh al-Qummi (RA)'s comments in his *Manazil al-Akhirat,* that there will be approximately 60 stations over The Bridge on The Day of Judgment. Each one of us will have to answer questions satisfactorily at each of those stations. Only after one is finished with one station, is he going to proceed to the next one. Each station is named and the first station, according to Shaykh al-Qummi (RA), is *Prayer.*

Therefore, the first station in The Bridge involves *Questioning on Prayer* and how you fulfilled this obligation. If, in any case, you don't fulfill the requirements at that station, then unless you get intercession of The Infallible Prophet and Imams (AS) or by your own actions, you would fall down into the bellies of Hell without establishing the remainder of your good deeds in this world. Undoubtedly, the first thing Allah (SWT) will ask on The Day of Judgment is Prayer, and this comes to us from all The Prophets and Imams (AS).

THE BLESSINGS OF PRAYER

Muhammad, son of Ya'qub, quoting al-Sadiq (AS), says:

> When you recite the Adhan and the Iqamah, two rows of angels will perform the Prayer behind you; but if you said the Iqamah (only), one row of angels would perform the Prayer behind you.
> *(Furu' al-Kafi, Volume 3, Page. 303)*

There are many other traditions to the same effect, some of which say that the length of each row is as the distance between the east and the west.

al-Baqir (AS) has quoted The Prophet of Allah (S) as saying:

> When a believing servant stands for the Prayer, Allah (SWT) looks at him until he finishes. Allah's Mercy shadows over his head, the angels surround him from all sides up to the horizon of the heaven, and Allah (SWT) assigns an angel to stand at his head, saying*: '0' Worshipper! If*

> *you know who is looking at you, and to whom you are supplicating, you will look nowhere else, nor will you leave your position.'*
> *(Mustadrak al-Wasa'il, Chapter 2, Tradition 22)*

He further said:

> Whoever performs 2 units of Prayer without paying attention to any worldly matter, Allah (SWT) will forgive him his sins.
> *(Mustadrak al-Wasa'il, Chapter 2, Tradition 13)*

Considerable importance has been attached to Prayer, and no words can describe the amount of reward Allah (SWT) grants to this individual, who is only fulfilling an obligation. The Aimmah (AS) have said:

> Prayer is what angels love,
> Prayer is the practice of The Prophets (AS),
> Prayer is the light of understanding,
> Prayer is what makes faith strong,
> Prayer is what makes actions accepted,
> Prayer increases sustenance,
> Prayer keeps you away from illness,
> Prayer is what Shaytan hates,
> Prayer is a weapon to confront your enemies,
> Prayer is what will assist you with The Angel of Death (AS),
> Prayer is the light in your grave,
> Prayer is an answer to Munkar and Nakeer (AS), and
> Prayer is what will help you in the grave till The Judgment Day.

TREATING PRAYER LIGHTLY

Some wives of The Prophet of Allah (S) have said that:

> The Prophet of Allah (SWT) used to talk to us and we used to talk to him. But when the time for the Prayer arrived he appeared as if he did not know us and we did not know him, as his attention was fully directed to Allah (SWT).
> *(Mustadrak al-Wasa'il, Chapter 2, Tradition 17)*

Ibn Tawus (RA) says, in *Falah al-Sail*, that when al-Husayn (AS) used to perform the wudhu, his face changed color and his joints trembled. Asked about the reason, The Imam said:

Treating Prayer Lightly

> When one is going to stand before The Owner of The Throne, his color ought to turn pale and his joints to tremble.

The same narrator also states Al-Hasan, son of 'Ali (AS) used to experience a similar condition before and during Prayer. (*Bihar al-Anwar, Volume 77, Page 346.)*

Unfortunately, many of us treat Prayer as another kind of daily entry in our logbook. Some of us not only treat the timely performance of Prayer lightly, but others do not even offer this obligation, which is a duty that carries immense weight. To those who treat Prayer lightly, The Prophet (S) says:

> The one who takes Prayer lightly is not of me. No! By Allah (SWT)! Such a person will not reach The Pond of al-Kawthar.

According to The Prophet (S), one who wastes his Prayer will be raised with *Qarun* and *Haman,* so that it will be right for Allah (SWT) to put him in Hell together with the hypocrites.

al-Sadiq (AS) said to Zurarah (RA):

> *Don't be negligent in regard to your Prayers.* Verily, The Prophet (May Peace Be Upon Him And is Progeny) said on his deathbed:
>
> One who makes light of his Prayers does not belong to me, or the one who takes intoxicating drinks. And, by God! He will not reach me at The Pond (of al-Kawthar).
> *(Furu' al-Kafi, iii, 269)*

al-Kulayni (RA) further reports with his trustworthy narrators, from Abu Basir, that al-Kadhim (AS) said:

> At the time of his death my father said to me, 'My son, the one who makes light of Prayer will not receive our intercession'.
> *(Furu` al-Kafi, iii, 270)*

al-Khumeini (RA) has the following advice to those people who treat the performance of The Five Daily Prayer lightly and of no concern:

> A devout person should be observant of the times of his worship under every circumstance. Of course, he should observe the timings of Prayer, which is the most important of the acts of worship, and carry it out in the most meritorious part of its time, refraining from engaging in any other work during those times.

In the same way as he assigns a certain time to making an earning and for study and debate, he should do the same in respect of these acts of worship. During this time, he must be free from other pre-occupations, so that he can achieve concentration of the heart. This makes up the quintessence and kernel of worship.

But should he, like this author, offer his Prayers out of compulsion and consider the performance of the worship of The Lord as a superfluous matter, he would, of course, delay it as long as it can be delayed. And when he offers it, he offers the Prayer in a perfunctory manner, considering it as an impediment in the way of what he imagines to be important tasks. However, such worship has not only no spiritual brilliance, it deserves divine wrath, and such a person is one who makes light of Prayer and neglects it as something trivial.

I seek refuge in God from making light of Prayer and not giving it its due importance.
(al-Tawhid, Quarterly Islamic Journal. 27th Hadith – Prayer and Concentration)

GENESIS OF THE PRESCRIBED PRAYER

al-Majlisi (RA) writes a long narration in his book *Hayaat al-Quloob* (Part Two), about one of the incidents that took place during Me'raj:

At Bayt al-Ma'moor, The Prophet (S) beheld The Ka'bah directly under him, so that if he had dropped anything from his hand, it would have fallen on its roof. The Prophet (S) says:

I heard a voice saying, *'This is the sacred place, and you are the ordained Prophet, imparting honor to the temple. Whatever exists on earth has its similitude in Paradise'.*

My Lord then commanded me to open my hand, and take of the water flowing from the right pillar of The Empyrean, which I did; and for this reason it became meritorious to take up water for ablution with the right hand.

A voice then commanded, *'Wash your face with this water that you may be pure to behold The Light of My Majesty and Glory. Then wash your*

hands, for you will take My Word. Then draw your wet hands over your head and your feet, which signifies that I will draw The Hand of Mercy over your head, and send down My Blessings on you. Drawing the hand over the foot will elevate you up through several regions where no foot has ever trodden, nor will it ever after you'.

The Most High then commanded, '*Turn towards The Black Stone which is before you and extol Me according to the number of curtains by saying ALLAHU AKBAR!'* On account, seven repetitions of this phrase have been recommended for Prayer, because there were seven curtains.

He (S) passed the seven heavens and seven curtains of exaltation and glory, and arrived near the place of communion with The Merciful Lord of Glory. *Prayer is The Celestial Ascent of The Believer.* When the perfect believer thus ascends, and recites the seven *Takbeers*, the curtains of darkness, which on account of errors of worldly inclination come between him and The Most High, are removed, and he approaches The Lord of The lords.

The Lord then commanded The Prophet (S), *'Now you have arrived at this place of communion with Me, pronounce My Name'*. Accordingly The Prophet (S) said, *'In the Name of Allah, The Compassionate, The Merciful'*, and thus this phrase became established as the beginning to each chapter.

Being commanded to offer praise, he said, *'Thanks to Allah (SWT), The Lord of The Universe'*, and proceeded in this manner till he recited the whole Chapter *'Praise be to Allah (SWT), The Lord of all creations'*.

A voice then commanded him to recite The Chapter of Divine Unity, saying, '*That Chapter is a description of My Praise and Attributes. What likeness can exist between Me and My creations?'*

After I had recited this Chapter, *'Say! Allah is One; He is Perfect; He neither begets, nor is begotten; and there is none like Him'*, the voice said, *'Bow before My exaltation, and put your hands on your knees and look toward My Empyrean'*.

On doing this, Light from The Glory of God overpowered me, and I fell into a swoon, and by divine inspiration, I said, *'Praise and Thanks to The God of The Glory'*. In purity I named the Lord of exaltation, and I am employed in His Praise.

> After repeating this I soon recovered, and the tremor of my spirit subsided, when by divine inspiration, I had seven times pronounced the ascription of praise. It was then ordained that this expression of praise should, in the performance of Prayer, be recited in the bending position.
>
> Allah (SWT) then commanded me to raise my head and stand erect, I heard the voices of the angels uttering praises and ascribing unity and thanksgiving to God. I said, '*Allah (SWT) hears everyone that utters His Praises*'.
>
> I looked up and saw a light more intense than that which had caused me to swoon before, and my fear was greater than in the former instance. Out of awe, I fell into prostration before The King, The Lord of The Glory, and placed my face in the dust of humility, and on account of the exaltation, I witnessed, seven times repeated by divine inspiration, '*Glory and praise to The Exalted Allah*'. At each repetition of this ascription, my terror diminished, till I recovered from the state of the overwhelming awe, and attained to perfect knowledge of Allah (SWT).
>
> I then raised my head from prostration, and sat till I recovered from the amazement into which I had fallen. By divine inspiration, I again looked upward, and saw a light more overpowering than I had witnessed before, and again fell involuntarily in prostration before The Lord, and repeated seven times, '*Glory and praise to Allah*'. Thereafter, I was more worthy of beholding the divine lights.
>
> I again raised my head, and sat for a while, and looked toward the angels.

For this reason, al-Majlisi (RA) says, two prostration in (a unit of) Prayer were established, and sitting a short time after them became meritorious.

The Prophet (S) continues,

> I then arose and stood in the attitude of a servant before my Lord, when He commanded me to recite again The Chapter of Praise, and afterwards The Chapter of Power (Qadr). I again bent with my hands on my knees, and then prostrated myself with my head on the ground. As I was about to rise, The Most High commanded, '*Mention My favors to you and pronounce My Name*'.

> By divine inspiration I said, '*In The Name of Allah, and by Him, There is no God but Allah, and all perfect names belong to Allah*'.
>
> When I had repeated the two testimonies, He commanded, '*Pronounce blessings on yourself and on your Family*'. I prayed, '*O Allah! Have mercy on me and on my Family*', which was answered with blessings from The Most High.
>
> On looking around, I beheld the angels and spirits of The Prophets arrayed in ranks behind me, and The Most High Commanded me to salute them and I said, '*Peace be upon you and The Mercy and Blessings of Allah*'. The Most High then addressed me saying, '*I am your Peace, Mercy, and Blessing, and of the Imams after you*'.

THE PRESENCE OF HEART IN PRAYER

al-Sadiq (AS) has said:

> Dear to me is the believer from among you who attends to God with his heart at the time of Prayer and does not pre-occupy his heart with any mundane matter. For, whenever a devotee turns with his heart to God, The Exalted, during Prayer, God heeds him and turns towards him the hearts of the faithful who regard him with affection, following God's love of him.
> *(al-Hurr al-'Amili, Wasa'ilush-Shi'ah, iv, 686)*

The Commander of the Faithful, Imam 'Ali (AS) says:

> If the worshipper knew to what extent His (Allah's) Mercy surrounded him during Prayer, he would never raise his head from the state of prostration.

According to a number of traditions, the Prayer has been called - a believer's heavenly journey that protects him from moral indecencies. Ayatullah Ibrahim Amini says in his book *Self Building* that, '*it is a pure sparkling stream of spirituality that whosoever enters it five times a day will purify his soul from all sorts of pollution and contamination*'. Likewise, a Prayer offered without heart's presence, although satisfies the performance of compulsory religious obligation, nevertheless, does not help in elevating the worshipper towards higher spiritual realms.

In another tradition, he said:

> A Prayer, half of it may be accepted, or one-third, or a quarter, or one-fifth, or even one-tenth. Another Prayer may be folded like an old dress, and be thrown back at the face of its owner. No part of the Prayer is yours except that part which you perform with an attentive heart.
> *(Bihar al-Anwar, Volume 81, Page 260, Chapter 16, Tradition 59)*

A similar tradition is narrated by al-Kulayni (RA) in al-Kafi, 3, page 363. al-Baqir and al-Sadiq (AS) have further said:

> Nothing of your Prayer is yours except that which you did with an attentive heart. So, if one performed it completely erroneously, or neglected its disciplines, it would be folded and thrown back at its owner's face.
> *(Wasa'ilush-Shi'ah, Volume 4, Page 687, Chapter 3, Tradition 1)*

al-Sadiq (AS) warns us that:

> When a servant stands to offer Prayer, Allah (SWT) pays attention to him and does not shift His attention until the servant deviates from His remembrance for the third time. When this happens, Allah (SWT) too turns His attention away from the worshipper.

Therefore, the heart's presence is a must in every single act in Prayer and that is the only way to achieve the merits hidden in this great obligation. It is narrated in *Bihar al-Anwar* that in the above instances, if the worshipper returns his attention and struggles not to lose his concentration, then his past sins are erased and he shall be granted such blessings that his reward cannot be counted. Allah (SWT) says:

> Pay attention to Me, because I and the Angels are paying attention to you (in your Prayer).

According to al-Khumeini (RA), '*the reality of invocation and remembrance is the invocation of the heart, without which the invocation of the tongue will be futile and worthless. This is referred to in a number of traditions*'.

In his book *Self Building,* al-Amini relates:

> In as much as heart's presence is important and worthwhile, in the same proportion, its attainment is extremely difficult. No sooner a person starts his Prayer, Shaytan whispers in his heart pulling him from one side to another, and continuously engaging him into all sorts of thoughts and memories.

The heart engages itself into accounting, planning, reviewing past and future problems, solving academic problems, very often recollecting during Prayer, and topics, which were forgotten by him completely. And when he returns to himself, he discovers his Prayer are over.

STRATEGIES FOR CONCENTRATING IN PRAYER - INTRODUCTION

Attention is like a muscle. Initially, when you try and hold your attention on something, it may feel that you are using more and more energy and it is fatiguing. That perception is sound, as you have to use energy to maintain attention. However, the more you flex your attention the stronger it becomes, and easier to hold.

From the moment you are born your mind functions every second, minute, hour, and day of your life. It is active day and night, extensively while awake, less so while you're asleep, but it is continually working. It is therefore, apparent that the train of thought would continue while you are saying your Prayer unless you make changes to the way you function in Prayer.

SETTING THE PRAYER SCENE AND BURNING INCENSE

The place you say your Prayer should be special. Every item that can distract you from your Prayer should be taken care of. The room should be the one that you don't use regularly, and should be neat and clean, a comfortable temperature, and dark. With comfortable temperature, you do not have to worry or entertain thoughts that may distract you when the room is hot or cold. Human skin is filled with thermal receptors that will constantly remind you of any discomfort to your body.

If the room you use to say your Prayer is slightly dark, the sense of darkness brings into us fear and awe, increasing one's concentration by further limiting eyesight. The lesser the items you are able to see during Prayer, the better it is. The walls should be free from pictures and other objects that might attract your attention or stimulate a memory or thought.

You are also advised to select an isolated place free from noise and disturbance. You should not have direct access to a telephone, as its ring would only create thoughts in your mind as to the urgency of the call. Also, you should be away from any kind of smell from the kitchen to allow you to focus more on the task at hand, rather than salivating and thinking about food during Prayer. Finally, you should appreciate and respect your communication with Allah (SWT) by closing doors (not locking them) of the room you pray in, so as not to hear other family members conversing and kids screaming at each other.



CONCENTRATION IN PRAYER

Setting The Prayer Scene And Burning Incense

You should burn incense to perfume your Prayer room. It is a greatly recommended act and carries significant weight in research and science. There is significant evidence on the practical applications of burning incense, as this is one major way to relax one's nerves and emotions, and through deep breathing and meditation, a high inner state of purity is attained. Aroma therapists are experts in this field and the oils they use to apply on the skin or burn to release fumes can significantly reduce stress in the brain, lower muscle activity, decrease the train of thoughts, thereby increasing concentration in Prayer.

According to researchers, the aromatic properties of pure, natural essential oils are a catalyst for change in the human mind and body. Essential oil aromas stimulate the part of the brain that affects emotion. The shape of an essential oil molecule is like a key that opens lock-like structure in the olfactory nerve receptors in our nostrils. Impression of the aroma is sent directly and immediately to the limbic system where memories are stored and pleasure and emotion is perceived. When stimulated, the limbic system releases chemicals that affect the central nervous system. *Serotonin* counteracts anxiety, *endorphins* reduce pain, and so forth.

Inhaling essential oils can also help one attain a pleasurable emotional balance. A balanced emotional state in turn can have a therapeutic effect on physical problems, particularly those that are stress-related.

Therefore, increasing your level of concentration, through relaxation with essential oils, using direct inhalation or diffusion is highly recommended. Direct inhalation is beneficial when immediate relief is needed. For instance, to relieve stressful thoughts, anxiety or lethargy before Prayer, drip 2-5 drops of *Chamomile* onto a handkerchief, hold it under your nose and breathe deeply. Because of their volatile nature, essential oils will readily diffuse into the air. An aroma therapy lamp, a ceramic vessel equipped with a small basin to hold a mixture of water and essential oil is a good way to diffuse scent. The basin is warmed from underneath by a candle or light bulb. Diffusing relaxing oils like *Chamomile, Rose or Sandalwood* can significantly reduce over-load in the brain, thus allowing you to be attentive in your Prayer.

WUDHU, AS A WAY TO INCREASE YOUR ATTENTION

Wudhu (formal/minor ablution) is one of the most effective ways to prepare the scene for your daily Prayer. It has powers to re-organize your thoughts before Prayer and assist you in offering your Prayer with confidence and not to be swerved by Shaytan, The Accursed.

Performing wudhu slowly and contemplating on the words in the invocation recommended during every wash would help you a great deal to think about your life, death and the



Creator whom you will be standing in front of soon. This way, you employ wudhu as a strategy to re-organize thoughts and prepare for Prayer. There should be no interval of talking and discussing worldly matters between the performance of wudhu and your Prayer. If there is an interval, you ought to recite invocations. This way the link of concentration is established between Wudhu and Prayer. True, the more time you engage in meditation and the conception of having only one thought before your Prayer, the more chances you have to say your Prayer without any distraction.

THE INVOCATION OF WUDHU

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ وَ بِاللّٰهِ وَالْحَمْدُ لِلّٰهِ الَّذِيْ جَعَلَ الْمَآءَ طَهُوْرًا
وَ لَمْ يَجْعَلْهُ نَجَسًا

At the beginning of Wudhu, you start in the Name of Allah (SWT) and praise Him for making the water a pure element.

اَللّٰهُمَّ اجْعَلْنِيْ مِنَ التَّوَّابِيْنَ وَاجْعَلْنِيْ مِنَ الْمُتَطَهِّرِيْنَ

At the time of washing your hands, you request Allah (SWT) to place you among those who seek His forgiveness and those who are pure.

اَللّٰهُمَّ لَقِّنِيْ حُجَّتِيْ يَوْمَ اَلْقَاكَ وَ اَطْلِقْ لِسَانِيْ بِذِكْرِكَ

At the time of rinsing the mouth, you invoke to Allah (SWT) to teach you the correct way to answer the questions on The Day of Judgment when you shall meet His Divine Presence.

اَللّٰهُمَّ لاَ تُحَرِّمْ عَلَيَّ رِيْحَ الْجَنَّةِ وَاجْعَلْنِيْ مِمَّنْ يَشُمُّ
رِيْحَهَا وَ رَوْحَهَا وَ طِيْبَهَا

At the time of rinsing the nose, you request Allah (SWT) not to deprive you from the smell of Paradise and to place you among those who smell its fragrance.

اَللّٰهُمَّ بَيِّضْ وَجْهِيْ يَوْمَ تَسْوَدُّ فِيْهِ الْوُجُوْهُ وَلاَ تُسَوِّدْ
وَجْهِيْ يَوْمَ تَبْيَضُّ فِيْهِ الْوُجُوْهُ

At the time of washing the face, you ask Allah (SWT) to brighten your face on that Day when He will disgrace and darken the faces of a great number of people.



The Invocation Of Wudhu

اَللّٰهُمَّ اَعْطِنِيْ كِتَابِيْ بِيَمِيْنِيْ وَالْخُلْدَ فِيْ الْجِنَانِ
بِيَسَارِيْ وَ حَاسِبْنِيْ حِسَابًا يَّسِيْرًا

At the time of washing the right forearm, you plead to Allah (SWT) to place the scroll of your deeds in your right hand and the certificate of permanency in Paradise in your left hand, and that He should render your accounts leniently.

اَللّٰهُمَّ لاَ تُعْطِنِيْ كِتَابِيْ بِشِمَالِيْ وَلاَ مِنْ وَّرَآءِ ظَهْرِيْ
وَلاَ تَجْعَلْهَا مَغْلُوْلَةً اِلٰى عُنُقِيْ وَ اَعُوْذُ بِكَ
مِنْ مُّقَطَّعَاتِ النِّيْرَانِ

At the time of washing the left arm, you ask Allah (SWT) not to place the scroll of your deeds in your left hand, nor on your back, and He should not hang it around your neck. You also seek refuge from the fierce eternal Fire of Hell.

اَللّٰهُمَّ غَشِّنِيْ بِرَحْمَتِكَ وَ بَرَكَاتِكَ وَعَفْوِكَ

At the time of wiping the head, you request Allah (SWT) to cover you with His Mercy, Blessings and Pardon.

اَللّٰهُمَّ ثَبِّتْنِيْ عَلٰى الصِّرَاطِ يَوْمَ تَزِلُّ فِيْهِ الْاَقْدَامُ وَاجْعَلْ
سَعْيِيْ فِيْ مَا يُرْضِيْكَ عَنِّيْ يَا ذَالْجَلاَلِ وَالْاِكْرَامِ

Finally, at the time of wiping the feet, you ask Allah (SWT) to keep you steadfast on His Path on that Day when feet shall slip, and make your efforts like of those that will please Him.

It is reported in authentic traditions that the Infallible Imams (AS) used to tremble and sometimes even the color of their skin changed, demonstrating fear and awe for Allah (SWT) whilst performing the act of wudhu. One should try and create, as well as maintain such fear whilst performing wudhu.



STRATEGY 1
UNDERSTANDING AND APPRECIATING ALLAH (SWT)'S PRESENCE

It is always to your benefit if you were to ponder the Existence of Allah (SWT) and His Power, Signs and Decisions related to this world and the next. Appreciating His presence is one way of bringing humility into your heart and humbling yourself in Prayer, performed with attention and concentration. It is only He Who looks at you Mercifully during your Prayer, and you ought to keep this in mind every time you say your Prayer.

Abu Ja'fer, the son of Babawayh al-Qummi (RA) says,

> ... Allah (SWT), Exalted is He, is One and Absolutely Unique. There is no one like Him. He is Prior; He never was, and never will be, but The Hearing and The Seeing One. The Omniscient; The Wise; The Living; The Everlasting; The Mighty; The Holy; The Knowing One; The Powerful; The Self-sufficient.
>
> He is a Thing, but not like other things. He is Unique, Eternal Refuge; He begets not lest He may be inherited, nor is He begotten lest He may be associated with others. There is no one like Him. He has no equal or opponent, compeer or consort. Nothing can be compared with Him. He has no rival, no partner. Human eyes cannot behold Him, while He discerns the power of eyes. The thoughts of men cannot compass Him, while He is aware of them. Slumber overtakes Him not, nor sleep.
>
> He is The Gracious and The Knowing One, The Creator of all things. There is no deity other than Him. To Him alone belongs The Power of Creation and Authority. Blessed is Allah (SWT), The Lord of the Worlds.

Therefore, piety, perseverance and appreciation of The Lord and His Mightiness are effective ingredients in developing and maintaining your attention in Prayer. This way, you can willingly humble yourself in Prayer.

A good example is from The Prophet (S) who used to treat Prayer very seriously and gave his full attention and concentration. He appreciated and knew his Creator well enough to fear His Presence and attend with full concentration when standing before Him. al-Khumeini (RA) reports a tradition that, *'For ten years The Prophet of Allah (S) stood on his toes (in his Prayer) until his blessed feet became swollen and his face turned pale. And he would stand erect all night, until a time came when the Lord consoled him (with the following verse):*

> We have not sent down The Qur'an on you to cause you distress.
> *(Qur'an - Chapter 20, Verse 2)*

al-Saduq (RA) quotes the following advice from al-Sadiq (AS) that he gave to one of his trusted companions:

> O' Servant of Allah! When you offer Prayer, pray like someone who bids farewell and fears that he will never return (i.e. pray in such a manner as if it were the last Prayer of your life). Then fix your gaze on the point of your prostration. If you know that there is someone on your left or right, you take more care in offering your Prayer; then know that you stand in front of Someone Who sees you and you don't see Him.
> *(al-Hurr al-`Amili, Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, iv, 685)*

STRATEGY 2
REMINDING YOURSELF OF ALLAH

One of the reasons why *Adhan* and *Iqamah* have been much emphasized before Prayer is to establish a strong link between the worshipper and his Creator, before he ventures into this sacred journey of Prayer and be in direct communication with The Almighty. This way, you start reminding and convincing yourself of the presence of Allah (SWT) before you begin Prayer.

> Lo! In the creation of the heavens and the earth and (in) the difference of night and day are tokens (of His sovereignty) for men of understanding. Such as remembering Allah (SWT), standing, sitting, and reclining, considering the creation of the heavens and the earth, (and instinctively lament): Our Lord! You have not created this (world) in vain! Glory be on You! Preserve us from the doom of Fire.
> *(Qura'n - Chapter 3, Verse 90-91)*

The Great Scholar, al-Mutahhari (RA) quotes a tradition, which is referenced in the book *Light Within Me:*

> The aim in Dhikr (remembrance) of Allah (SWT) is that the heart be always aware of al-Haqq (The Most Truthful, a Name of Allah (SWT), for its practice banishes inattention.

Liturgies are as important as water is to the living cells within your body. Take, for instance, the air you breathe day and night, upon which your existence as well as that of other living beings is dependent, nothing can remain alive without it. What a marvelous gift it is. If all

the creation contrives such a thing, they cannot do that. The same applies to the other gifts that we have been favored without any hesitation from The Lord (e.g. sight, hearing, taste, and so forth), each one of which carries unlimited benefits.

He fulfills your needs in this world and the hereafter, without needing your adoration. Observance of His commands, or transgressing them does not make any difference to Him. It is for the sake of your own benefit that He has enjoined good and forbidden indecencies.

al-Khumeini (RA) comments, *'while remembering all these, do you not see that respecting and obeying such a Benefactor is essential for you? He is The Creator and King of this vast cosmos, whose infiniteness cannot be measured or even conceived by human intellect'.*

'We, human beings, creatures crawling on one of the smallest planets miserably fail to grasp the extent of our own small world, whose sun cannot be compared with far greater suns of innumerable galaxies. Our solar system is nothing compared to other lesser solar systems, which still elude the keen eyes of great explorers and investigators of the world'.

We have been advised by the Scholars in Islam to try and remember Allah (SWT) at all times possible. This includes repeating certain phrases of worship and servitude, or it can be in the form of meditation, appreciating this world and the hereafter.

al-Taba Tabai (RA) in his book, *al-Mizan* Volume Two, discusses the way of living that is happier and the life that is more durable. In this narration, al-Daylami narrates in his *al-Irshad* that Allah (SWT), at one stage during The Ascension (on The Day of Me'raj), told The Prophet (S):

> As for the happy way of living, it is that in which the person is not tired of remembering Me, does not forget My bounties, and does not ignore My rights (on him). He seeks My pleasure day and night. The everlasting life is realized when the person works for his spiritual benefit until the world loses its significance for him, and looks small in his eyes. The hereafter becomes great for him.
>
> He gives preference to My pleasure over his own desire; seeks My pleasures; thinks the right of My bounty great; keeps in mind what I have done for him (i.e. for his benefit); remembers Me day and night whenever he is tempted to commit any wrong or sin; keeps his heart clean from that I dislike; hates Shaytan and his whisperings, and does not let Shaytan establish a hold over, or a passage to his heart.
>
> When he acts like this, then I put (My) love into his heart, until I make his heart, as well as his leisure and engagement, and his thought and speech, a part of (My) favors which I have bestowed on those of

(My) Creations who love Me; and I open his heart's eye and ear, so that he hears with his heart and looks with his heart to My Majesty and Greatness; and I make the world straitened for him and make him hate it with all its pleasures; and I caution him of the world and all that it contains, as a shepherd protects his sheep from dangerous pasture lands.
When this happens, he flees from people and transfers from the house of termination to the abode of eternity, and from the house of Shaytan to The Seat of The Beneficent Allah (SWT). O' Ahmad! I adorn him with dignity and majesty. So, this is the good way of living and the eternal life, and it is the status of those who are pleased (with Me).

So, whosoever acts for My pleasure, I give him three characteristics: I teach him gratitude, which is not polluted by ignorance, remembrance, that is unadulterated with forgetfulness, and love that takes preference over the love of creatures. Then when he loves Me, I love him and I open the eye of his heart to My Majesty. I do not keep (My) special beings hidden from him. I converse with him secretly in the dark of night and the light of day, until he ceases talking with and sitting with the creatures.

I make him hear My talk and the speech of My Angels. I make My secret known to him, which I have kept hidden from all (My) creation. I dress him in modesty, until all the creation is awed of him. He walks on the earth (and all his sins are) forgiven. I make his heart hearing and seeing, and I do not hide from him anything of The Garden or the Fire. I make known to him the terror and afflictions awaiting the people on The Day of Resurrection, and about the things I will question the rich and the poor, as well as the learned and the ignorant.

I will make him sleep (in peace) in his grave, and I will send Munkar and Nakeer (AS) to question him. He will not experience the sorrow of death, or the fright of the prelude (of the next world). Then I will erect his weighing scale for him, and will unroll his book (of deeds). I will then put his book in his right hand and he shall read it unfolded. Then I will not keep any interpreter between Me and him.

So these are the attributes of the lovers. O' Ahmad! Make your concern one concern, make your tongue one tongue, and make your body (i.e. your person) alive that is never oblivious (of Me). Whoever is oblivious of Me, I do not care in which valley he perishes.



STRATEGY 3
A RELAXED AND ALERT STATE OF MIND

An alert state of mind is one of the many vital ingredients of Prayer. If you are tired and exhausted, it is better to rest and do some deep breathing and relaxation exercises before you make the commitment to stand in front of your Lord. And yes, it is preferred to pray a bit late but with attention and concentration. Of course, the delay in performing Prayer from its allocated time should only be for the length of time one has to relax and rejuvenate himself, gain energy to stand before the Almighty. As Imam 'Ali (AS) has advised us:

> Do not offer Prayer in the state of drowsiness. While offering Prayer, do not think about yourself because you are standing in front of Allah (SWT). Indeed, only that portion of the Prayer will be accepted that he has paid full attention towards Allah (SWT).

al-Saduq (RA) reports from Imam 'Ali (AS) that he said:

> None of you should ever stand for Prayer in a lazy or drowsy state, nor should you let (random) thoughts pass through your mind (in the state of Prayer*)*. For, in that state, you stand before your Glorious and Almighty Lord. Verily, the reward a devotee derives from Prayer is equal to the extent of it that he offers with an attentive heart.
> *(al-Hurr al-`Amili, Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, iv, 687)*

In *Fiqh al-Ridha* it is stated:

> When you want to perform the Prayer, do not go to it lazily, sleepy, hurriedly, or unmindfully. Approach it calmly, solemnly and slowly. You should display submission, imploringly and humbly to Allah (SWT). You are to show awe and signs of fear and hope, with caution and apprehension. Thus, you are to stand before Him, as an escapee and sinful slave stands at attention before his master; on the alert, with joined heels, erected trunk, not looking to right and left, reckoning as if you see Him. If you do not, He certainly does see you…
> *(Mustadrak al-Wasa'il, Chapter 1, Tradition 7)*

Imam (AS)'s posture always allowed him to relax and to be comfortable. Your posture in Prayer also has to allow you to remain alert and aware. There is a two-way relationship between slumping and distraction. Good posture means there is musculoskeletal balance. This balance helps to protect the joints in the spine from excessive stress. It also guards against injury and possible deformity. Good posture helps prevent distress and pain that lead to distraction.

As your concentration in Prayer progresses, your body metabolism will generally become slower and slower, until your heartbeat and breathing are barely perceptible. At this point, when you are totally focused in your Prayer, it is when you achieve your greatest benefit from the worship that has limitless rewards. You would seem to be at a point where mental fatigue and stress is easily released.

Upon completion of your Prayer, most often you will feel relaxed, renewed, alert, and better focused. Your senses will be more acute. You will often find yourself with a heightened sense of awareness. You will generally feel confident and secure in a positive state of mind. Happiness will be yours. This is the state of mind you should strive to achieve after completion of Prayer.

STRATEGY 4
UNDERSTANDING WHAT YOU RECITE

It is clear that if you don't strive to learn and appreciate the meanings of the verses and glorification you proclaim in your Prayer, you stand very little chance of developing and maintaining the concentration you need to focus in Prayer. Focusing on the meanings of what you recite would generally keep your mind busy and involved in Prayer.

In the Thawab al- A'mal, al-Saduq quotes with his chain of transmitters from al-Sadiq (AS):

> One who offers two units of Prayer with the knowledge of what he says therein, he does not finish them without God forgiving him every sin that there is between him and God.
> *(Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, iv, 686)*

Understanding every word of what you recite in Prayer is helpful in developing a tranquil mind and in allowing you to control your immediate thoughts and feelings that would distract you from your Prayer. You also need to appreciate the words and its meaning in your language of preference, recite and understand them so that your mind does not wander and remains focused on the task at hand. However, one would not think or ponder on the meanings for this is not the time for it, but only occupy his mind with the meanings of the phrases being recited.

The Prophet of Allah (S) is quoted to have said to Abu Dhar:

> Two light units of Prayer offered with contemplation are better than a whole night spent in worship.
> *(Bihar al-Anwar, Volume 74, Page 82 and Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, iv, 686)*

Takbir

اَللّٰهُ اَكْبَرُ

Allah is Great

Translation of Chapter of al-Hamd

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيْمِ

I commence with The Name of Allah, The Compassionate, The Merciful

اَلْحَمْدُ لِلّٰهِ رَبِّ الْعَا لَمِيْنَ

Special Praise be to Allah, The Sustainer of the creation

اَلرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيْمِ

The Compassionate, The Merciful

مَا لِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّيْنِ

Lord of The Day of Judgment

اِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَ اِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِيْنُ

You alone we worship, and to You alone we pray for help

اِهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيْمَ

Guide us to the straight path

صِرَاطَ الَّذِيْنَ اَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوْبِ عَلَيْهِمْ
وَلَا الضَّآلِّيْنَ

The path of those whom You have favored, Not of those who have incurred Your wrath, nor of those who have gone astray

Translation of Chapter of al-Ikhlas

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيْمِ

I commence with The Name of Allah, The Compassionate, The Merciful

قُلْ هُوَ اللّٰهُ اَحَدٌ

Say: Allah is One - The Eternal Being

اَللّٰهُ الصَّمَدُ

Allah is He Who is independent of all beings

لَمْ يَلِدْ وَ لَمْ يُوْلَدْ

He begets none, nor was He begotten

وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَّهُ كُفُوًا اَحَدٌ

And none in the creation is equal to Him

Translation of the Dhikr During Ruku (Bending) and Sajdah (Prostration)

سُبْحَانَ رَبِّيَ الْعَظِيْمِ وَ بِحَمْدِهِ

Glory be to my High Sustainer and I praise Him

سُبْحَانَ رَبِّيَ الأَعْلي وَ بِحَمْدِهِ

Glory be to my Great Sustainer, Most High, and I praise Him

Before Going into Prostration

سَمِعَ اللّٰهُ لِمَنْ حَمِدَهُ

Allah hears and accepts the praise of one who praises

Istighfar, Between Two Prostration

اَسْتَغْفِرُ اللّٰهَ رَبِّي وَ اَتُوْبُ اِلَيْهِ

I seek forgiveness from Allah Who is my Sustainer, and I turn to Him

While Standing

بِحَوْلِ اللّٰهِ وَ قُوَّتِهِ اَقُوْمُ وَ اَقْعُدُ

I stand and sit with the help and strength of Allah

Translation of Tasbihat al-Arba'ah

سُبْحَانَ اللّٰهِ وَالْحَمْدُ لِلّٰهِ وَ لَآاِلٰهَ اِلاَّ اللّٰهُ وَاللّٰهُ اَكْبَرُ

Glory be to Allah, and all praise is for Him and there is no one worth worshipping other than Allah, and He is Greater than any description

Translation of Tashahhud and Salam

وَ اَشْهَدُ اَنَّ مُحَمَّدًا عَبْدُهُ وَرَسُوْلُهُ

I testify that there is none worth worshipping except the Almighty Allah, Who is One and has no partner

اَشْهَدُ اَنْ لَآ اِلٰهَ اِلاَّ اللّٰهُ وَحْدَهُ لاَ شَرِيْكَ لَهُ

And I testify that Muhammad is His servant and Prophet

اَللّٰهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلٰي مُحَمَّدٍ وَّ اٰلِ مُحَمَّدٍ

O Allah! Send Your blessings on Muhammad and his progeny

اَلسَّلاَمُ عَلَيْكَ اَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ وَ رَحْمَةُ اللّٰهِ وَ بَرَكَاتُهُ

O Prophet! Allah's peace, blessings and grace be upon you!



اَلسَّلاَمُ عَلَيْنَا وَ عَلـي عِبَادِ اللّـهِ الْصّـالِحِيْنَ

Allah's peace be on us, those offering prayers - and upon all pious servants of Allah

اَلسَّلاَمُ عَلَيْكُمْ وَ رَحْمَةُ اللّـهِ وَ بَرَكَاتُهُ

Allah's peace, blessings and grace be on you believers!

STRATEGY 5
PROPER PRONUNCIATION

Arabic language is considered one of the sweetest of all the languages. So, reciting Prayer with proper *Makhaarij* (proper pronunciation) and *Tajweed* (following the rules of the Arabic Language) and learning the rules of reciting The Qur'an, would make your efforts in maintaining attention a lot easier.

Listening to your own tone of voice (and of others), and how they can sound hurtful and blunt at times is yet another alternative. You should try and work with changing your tone to a more appropriate one. Combining the rules of recitation and frequency of your whole recitation is what is required and needs to be practiced. These qualities in The Prophet (S) were what made people stop and listen to The Prophet (S) reciting The Qur'an.

If you possessed these qualities in your voice, then you would never feel tired and exhausted reciting long Chapters of The Qur'an or reading long and repeated glorification during Prayer, because you would be deeply involved in the parts of the recitation itself. This is an effective way to prolong your bending (Ruku) and prostration (Sujud), and a way to lengthen your Prayer without discomfort.

For those devoted Muslims whose mother-tongue is not Arabic and have yet to master the correct recitation of the Arabic verses involved in Prayer, they are advised to at least learn to read the compulsory parts of the Prayer correctly and with proper pronunciation. This way they are sure their Prayer is valid. This person should also try and not completely focus on his recitation, as he would lose his focus on Allah (SWT). However, there is no excuse for not learning to recite with proper *Makhaarij* and *Tajweed.*

STRATEGY 6
CONFIDENCE

In his book *Self Building,* al-Amini suggests a secluded place, removal of all obstacles, strengthening of faith, remembrance of death, and readiness as four main ways to develop and maintain one's attention in Prayer. He also concludes that:

> If one does not succeed in the very first attempt, instead of getting disappointed, he should become more determined and serious in trying again, until attaining domination over the self gradually. The mind should be cleansed thoroughly from scattered thoughts and should be motivated to pay attention towards God Almighty. If attaining such a kind of attention is not possible within a day, few weeks or even few months, he should not be disappointed because, after all, such kind of devoted attention is possible.

To have firm intention and belief that whatsoever the case, you will never be mislead in Prayer, you need to be confident and accept with full heart that Shaytan's forces are weaker than what you have been endowed with by your loving Lord, The Most High. Allah (SWT) states in The Qur'an:

> Indeed! The cunning of Shaytan is feeble.
> *(Qur'an - Chapter 20, Verse 125)*

Moreover, it is only you who will be in turmoil on The Day of Judgment when Shaytan will exclaim:

> ... I only invited you to evil, and you accepted on your own volition. Therefore (On this Day of Judgment), do not blame me but blame your own selves.
> *(Qur'an - Chapter 14, Verse 22)*

Self-confidence is arguably one of the most important traits you can possess. Self-confidence reflects your assessment of your own self-worth. It will play a large part in determining your level of attention and concentration in Prayer.

Building self-confidence and defeating the distracting thoughts in Prayer takes time and effort. Goal setting is probably the most effective way of building self-confidence. By setting measurable goals, achieving them, setting new goals, achieving them and so on, you prove your ability to yourself. You are able to prove to yourself that you are able to perform and achieve effectively. You can see, recognize and enjoy your achievement, and feel real self-worth in that achievement. *Please refer the 30-Day Workbook for more details.*

STRATEGY 7
ALTERNATING RECITATIONS

Next, you need to alternate recitations by reciting different chapters of The Qur'an, different supplications and different forms of glorification in your Prayer. This is vital because your brain will not become accustomed and habituated to what is being recited daily and switch off attention to something else.

The human brain can handle different situations at any given time, so you need to restrain this quality whilst communicating with Allah (SWT). One way of doing this is alternating recitations so you are ever mindful. Learning and memorizing new chapters of The Qur'an, learning new and different supplications and glorification is therefore highly recommended.

For example, if you always recite *Suratul Qadr* after *Suratul Hamd* in your first unit of Prayer, then you would recite *Suratul Falaq* instead, or any other Chapter from The Qur'an. Since this is a completely new chapter, your mind will not allow any distracting thoughts since it is occupied and focused on completing the *new* Chapter.

Similarly, if you recite a particular invocation in your Qunoot, spend time to learn new and different invocations and recite them in your Prayer. Also, if you are used to recite glorification in your last prostration, why not try and have these recitations in your earlier prostration as well - something different at all times. We have to be careful though, because in some instances like *Tashahhud, Salaam,* and some other acts in Prayer, we are not allowed to add or substitute the compulsory recitations.

STRATEGY 8
CONTINUED CLEANLINESS

An important and attractive aspect of Islamic teaching is related to cleanliness. It means to be ritually pure at all times by performing ablution (wudhu) and ghusl (major ablution) whenever necessary. The major ablution (ghusl) on Friday, for example, has been much stressed and cleans your soul from many sins. By keeping yourself clean and pure, you make it difficult for Shaytan to enter your soul. Cleanliness is a barrier preventing lustful ideas and disruptive thoughts from entering your mind during Prayer. One of the traditions of The Prophet (S), which has come down in the form of an everlasting proverb is that,

> Cleanliness is part of faith, and faith leads a person to Paradise.

It is, therefore, a good idea to brush your teeth, perfume yourself, and observe some kind of uniform, preferably white, and stand in-front of Allah (SWT), fresh and clean. *Cleanliness is a weapon of a believer* and evokes inner enlightenment.

This part of your Prayer may involve any of the following elements: always wearing a clean white dress during Prayer, applying perfume, burning incense, using a clean Prayer mat and tidy Prayer room, seeking forgiveness before Prayer, and so forth. All the above-mentioned elements create a healthier and spiritual environment for Prayer.

STRATEGY 9
SEEKING FORGIVENESS AND ACCEPTING LIMITATONS

After every Prayer you should seek forgiveness, as this will indirectly increase your attention and concentration during Prayer and bring you nearer to Him. While reciting this invocation, you should sincerely repent to Allah (SWT) that the Prayer you just finished was not up to the required standards and pray to be forgiven for it by The Merciful Lord. Then, you return to Him promising that the next Prayer will be a better one. This process in itself is a motivation to perform better next time you stand before the Almighty. Accepting faults will create in you desire to perform even better.

STRATEGY 10
TRUST

It is said that The Commander of the Faithful, 'Ali (AS) used to writhe and tremble when it was time for the Prayer. Asked once about his uncommon state, he said:

> The time has come for the trust which Allah, The Exalted, offered to the heavens, the earth and the mountains, but they refused to carry it and were afraid of it.
> *(Mustadrak al-Wasa'il, Book of Prayer, Chapter 2, Tradition 14)*

This is in direct reference to the following verse of The Qur'an:

> Verily, We offered the trust to the Heavens, the earth and the mountains, but they refused to bear it, and were afraid thereof, and man undertook it. Verily he was (proved) unjust, ignorant.
> *(Qur'an - Chapter 33, Verse 72)*

Whenever The Infallible (AS) used to stand before Allah (SWT) in Prayer, their limbs trembled, and because of the intensity of fear, even the number of their breaths could be counted. They used to become restless as if bitten by a snake, and Prayer was offered as though there would never be another chance to offer another Prayer.

Muhammad, son of Ya'qub, quoting al-Sadiq (AS) in *Furu' al-Kafi, Volume 3, Page 300, Tradition 4 says:*

> My father used to say, when 'Ali, son of al-Husayn (AS) used to stand for the Prayer, he looked like a trunk of a tree, nothing of which would move unless the wind would move it.

In *al-'Ilal,* Aban ibn Taghlib, quoting Muhammad, son of 'Ali ibn al-Husayn:

> I said to al-Sadiq (AS): 'I noticed that when 'Ali, son of al-Husayn (AS) stood for the Prayer, his color changed.' He said to me: *By Allah (SWT), 'Ali ibn al-Husayn knew before whom he was standing.*
> *(Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, Volume 4, Page 685, Chapter 2, Tradition 4)*

This is an excellent precedent for us from The Infallible (AS) whose every word and action were in accordance with the pleasure of The Almighty. It is truly meritorious to be able to convince yourself that the Prayer you will be offering may be your last one and that you may not have a chance to say another Prayer. This behavior can be maintained only in pious people, and piety and the fear of Allah (SWT) are the two qualities you should endeavor to possess.

In *'Uddatud-Da`i,* it is stated:

> The imploring moaning of Ibrahim (AS) used to be heard from a mile's distance, such that Allah (SWT) praised him by saying: *'Ibrahim was mild, imploring, penitent'.*

When performing his Prayer, a sound of fizz like that of a boiler was heard coming from his chest. A similar sound was also heard from the chest of our Prophet (S). Fatimah (AS) used to pant in the Prayer because of her fear of Allah (SWT).
(Mustadrak al-Wasa'il, Chapter 2, Tradition 15)

STRATEGY 11
STRESS MANAGEMENT

> Of the important cordial disciplines of worship, especially the invoking worship, one is tranquillity, which is not the same tranquillity as demanded by the Scholars of Fiqh (Allah be pleased with them) in the Prayer. It is that the person who prays should perform his worship with quietude of the heart and a tranquillity of the mind. This is because if the worship were performed in a state of anxiety and with shaky heart,

> the heart would not have any reaction. Thus, no effects of worship would appear in the dominion of the heart, and the reality of the worship would not become an inner image of the heart.
> *(al-Khumeini, The Disciplines of Prayer)*

Your body responds to all kinds of stress by trying to get back to a normal physiological state. Depending on the stress agent, hormones like adrenaline, may surge. Your heartbeat and blood pressure will probably increase. Your blood sugar rises. Besides many health problems related to stress, from high blood pressure to asthma, significant overload is noticed in the brain, and with such a mind, one can hardly say his or her Prayer with concentration.
Less stress will bring much more happiness into your life and more vigilance in your Prayer. The stress you accumulate, as a result of your reaction to everyday events, bred by various anxieties, creates a barrier to your happiness and normal living.

No one can cause you to become stressful. Only those insecurities and deep-seated anxieties can cause you to react irrationally to events in your life and lead to stress. Once this is relieved, your interpersonal relationships will improve, as you emanate warmth from being at peace with yourself.

Once stress has been dissipated through an effective meditation and relaxation exercise, your view of the world becomes much more pleasant. This way the brain is also relieved of the pressure from the overload and you are able to concentrate in your Prayer. It is therefore recommended that you exercise, meditate and relax, employing deep breathing strategies before resting at night and in the early morning hours.

Take time for yourself to relax each day; exercise regularly after getting your doctor's okay; learn to let go of things which are outside your control; learn to adapt to changes; learn to take action when you can make a difference; avoid excessive caffeine, fats, and sugar; don't smoke; go away for the weekend, and give your time to something or someone you believe in.

STRATEGY 12
SENSELESS CONVERSATIONS

Let it be known that,

> There is no worship superior than silence…
> *(Prophet (S))*

It has been recorded that,

Senseless Conversations

> Silence is part of wisdom. It is a sign of every virtue. It is the way of the devotees of Allah (SWT), because Allah (SWT) likes it. It is the style of The Prophets (AS), and the habit of the chosen people.
> *(al-Sadiq (AS)*

According to traditions, all the organs in your body are safeguarded when your tongue is protected. However, in many cases, silence is strenuous to practice but very fruitful in the end. By maintaining silence and pondering over every sentence you speak, you would hardly commit yourself to speculation, backbiting, pride, mockery, lying, etc. This way, you have less to think about and less thoughts to interrupt you in your Daily Prayer.
You should try and protect the organs of your body from disobedient actions, as they would invite Allah (SWT)'s displeasure. The scholars have said, *'One's speech should always be in remembrance of Allah (SWT), one's silence should be an effort to think and contemplate, and one's vision should be for deriving a lesson'.*

It will only add to your disadvantage if you involve yourself in careless and purposeless conversations, as you increase the chances of losing the train of your thought in your Prayer. The more careless you are with the tongue, the more defensive you'll have to be, and Shaytan will not lose this opportunity to remind you of your inaccuracies and feelings of guilt during Prayer. You should be careful of your tongue at all times and employ it in earning only the pleasure of Allah (SWT).

Imam 'Ali (AS), The Master of Believers, once exclaimed to an individual who was chattering away and admonished him that,

> O' Man! You are dictating to your angel a letter to Allah (SWT), so speak what concerns you and omit that which does not concern you.

The celebrated mystic of our time, the great al-Taba Tabai (RA) concludes the following, after years of struggle in his quest for attaining spiritual perfection:

> I have witnessed the most precious effects of silence. Practicing silence for forty days and nights, speaking only when it is absolutely required and remaining occupied in meditation and invocation until attaining purity and enlightenment.

STRATEGY 13
MODERATION IN EATING

Eating and drinking is also one of those matters with regard to which people go to extremes and, of course, mostly towards excess. No doubt, you need food to live and it is necessary that food should reach the cells of your body to maintain life. However, the important question is how much food your body needs and whether excessive food is good or harmful.

al-Ridha (AS) says:

> You should know that a human body is like fertile land. If moderation is exercised in the matter of its development, i.e. necessary quantity of water is provided to it, which should neither be so excessive as to drown it and change into swamp and bog, nor so scanty that it should remain thirsty and dry, such land yields much produce. However, the land will become barren if not properly looked after.

Therefore, over-eating is a major cause of inattention in Prayer, and one needs to take care of this problem five times a day before every Prayer. Luqman Hakim once said to his beloved son:

> Dear son! When the stomach is full your faculty of thinking goes to sleep, and your tongue of wisdom becomes dumb and your limbs fail to worship Allah (SWT).

STRATEGY 14
CHECKING AND INSPECTION

Keep track of the level of your attention and concentration in Prayer. If it is the right level, give thanks; if wrong, ask for forgiveness.

Self-conditioning, contemplation and self-examination are essential pre-requisites for a seeker of truth who is battling with his self. Self-conditioning or stipulation means binding oneself with the resolution not to do anything against God's commands.

al-Khumeini (RA) advises you to specifically be in this state of mind at night, the time for introspection and inner deliberation, and evaluate your deeds of the whole day. *This is the time to see whether you have been honest to the Giver of all, to whom everybody is accountable. If you have been faithful to Him, you should be thankful to Him that He has made you successful in your intentions.* Furthermore, *Shaytan and his accursed legions may magnify the volume of the task in your eyes, but these are the guile played by the cheat. You should always curse, and drive away the devil and evil thoughts from within the depths of your heart and the domain of your mind.*

Reviewing your performance on the Daily Prayer should be part of the contemplation you employ every night, to be able to scan through all the problems and suggest possible solutions. Thus, the next Prayer is significantly different from the previous one. *Please refer the 30-Day Workbook for more details.*

STRATEGY 15
PUTTING THOUGHTS IN WRITING

Unfortunately, in any relaxed state and in particular the Prayer, it is only human to have numerous creative thoughts, as well as recollections of things you forgot or need to do. These thoughts may haunt your continued meditation if you don't write them down.

It has been advised by great scholars to write these thoughts down on a piece of paper so you may free your mind to concentrate on the Prayer. You can then more easily continue without clinging to thoughts you fear you might forget. You will be bringing your conscious and subconscious mind closer together and this will yield much useful information and ideas you will want to pursue upon completion of your Prayer. *Please refer the 30-Day Workbook for more details.*

STRATEGY 16
REMOVING OBSTACLES

Also, before the Prayer, all obstacles in attaining heart's presence must be removed. As such, you should relieve yourself before starting Prayer, and you should satisfy your hunger or thirst as well. Also, since over-eating creates a lack of attention and concentration, you should observe moderation if you have to eat before Prayer.

Drinking a full glass of water is recommended before Prayer. A campaign has been launched in several schools in the United Kingdom to encourage children to drink more water to increase their concentration. Studies have found that children who are dehydrated do not work as well in the classroom as those who have drunk the recommended eight glasses of water a day. All brain activity is neurological and is a chemical activity which doesn't function without water

If you are busy investigating something or you are disturbed and agitated about a particular event, you should try within the bounds of possibilities, to eliminate the causes of the worry before Prayer. *Think it, and work it out before you stand in front of the Almighty.* This way you appear before Allah (SWT) secured and free from insecurities of life.

The cloth you wear during Prayer may also be an obstacle if it is tight, or very loose and uncomfortable. To avoid such instances, proper attire to one's liking is recommended at all

times. The following tradition gives us an idea of what could transpire in Prayer and what one is supposed to do to maintain the concentration in his Prayer.

al-Khumeini (RA) reports from Shaykh Muhammad, son of al-Hasan (al-Tusi – RA) reporting in al-*Tahdhib* with his trustworthy narrators leading to Abu Hamzah al-Thumali RA), that he said:
I saw 'Ali, son of al-Husayn (al-Sajjad (AS) offering Prayer, when the cloak slipped from his shoulders. The Imam did not arrange it until he had finished his Prayer. When I questioned him about it, he said:

> *'Woe to you, don't you know before whom I stood? Nothing is accepted of a devotee's Prayer except what he offers with the proper attention of his heart'.*
>
> Thereupon I said to him, *'May I be ransomed for you, (if that is so) then we (i.e. the like of us) are doomed!'* He replied, *'No indeed. Verily God compensates for that for the faithful by the means of supererogatory Prayers'.*
> *(al-Hurr al-`Amili, Wasa'iI al-Shi'ah, iv, 688)*

STRATEGY 17
GRIEF-STRICKEN, SUBMISSION AND SADNESS

No doubt, sadness brings to your soul many benefits, one of which is a revolution of the soul. It is the time when you are sad and grief-stricken, that you are able to fully organize and empower yourself to be most attentive in Prayer. It is widely accepted that a sad mind is more attuned towards an objective (Allah (SWT), in this case) and more capable of maintaining a high level of attention and concentration.

There shouldn't be any problem practicing this kind of emotion before Prayer, since you have to warn yourself of the following, *'You have no way of knowing that your past sins have been forgiven; no way of knowing that you will refrain from committing sins in the future; no way of knowing that your actions win the pleasure of Allah (SWT)…'*
(al-Sadiq (AS)

The Prophet (S) puts this all clearly by saying to Abu Dhar (RA):

> O' Abu Dhar! Allah (SWT) has not been worshipped with anything like that of length of grief.
>
> O' Abu Dhar! Whoever is given knowledge which doesn't cause him to cry simply because he has been given knowledge, it will not benefit him. Allah (SWT) has described the learned and said:

> Surely those who were given knowledge before it, when it is recited unto them they fall upon their faces in prostration and they say, *'Glory be to our Lord! Surely the promise of Allah (SWT) shall take place'.* They fall on their faces crying and they become increasingly humble.

At this juncture, it should be made clear that crying and shedding tears for personal reasons during Prayer will make your Prayer null and void.

STRATEGY 18
PATIENCE, ACCEPTING FAULT, AND ADDRESSING THE PROBLEM TO ALLAH (SWT)

You should be patient with your practice of attention. You do not perform masterfully the first time in any given circumstance. It is the continued practice of meditation, relaxation and attention that reaps benefits. You should not expect specific benefits in a short period of time. Invoking Allah (SWT) and addressing your problem of inattention is a good practice, as He would definitely assist you in this matter.

Patience is vital when we have to perform obedient acts for the love of Allah (SWT), the Great. As He has said:

> Indeed, you will not get what I possess, but being patient with those things, which you don't like (but you still do) in order to seek My pleasure. Patience on My obedience is easier for you than patience in the Fire of Hell.
> *(Hadith al-Qudsi)*

Whenever you intend to perform a good deed, Shaytan is there instantly to persuade you not to do it. He may practice tricks on you and convince you not to do the deed, but you have to be careful. You should be able to identify these tricks and discard them. *Diagnosing* his entrance to your soul is an effective way to solve this issue. And if Shaytan is not successful in convincing you not to do a particular obedient act then he will try his level best to make you do it quickly and with the least of concentration.

What a difference between us and those obedient servants of Allah (SWT) who welcome acts of worship, attend to them with pleasure and fulfill them efficiently. We think that Allah (SWT) Almighty has burdened us with duties, consider them troublesome and view them as a burden. This is surely not so.
al-Khumeini (RA) reports that Patience is of 3 kinds:

> Patience at the time of Affliction; Patience in regard to Obedience; Patience in regard to Disobedience.

> One who bears patiently with affliction, resisting it with a fair consolation, Allah (SWT) uplifts him 300 degrees, the elevation of one degree over another being like the distance between earth and heavens.
>
> And one who is patient in regard to obedience, Allah (SWT) uplifts him 600 degrees, the elevation of one degree over another being like the distance between the earth's depths and The Throne.
>
> And one who is patient in regard to disobedience, Allah (SWT) uplifts him 900 degrees, the elevation of one degree over another being like the distance between the earth's depths and the furthest frontiers of The Throne.

STRATEGY 19
FASTING

al-Khumeini (RA) reports a tradition that there was once a person who was in great misfortune. He had nothing to eat and neither was he invited for a meal on that strenuous day. He thus decided to visit one of the houses of Allah (SWT) (i.e. a mosque) and declare his poverty in front of his Lord. It is reported that he passed the whole night in hunger and his invocation was not answered. The next day The Prophet (S) was informed of the situation. He (S), at that very moment, was blessed with a revelation from the Almighty that:

> Tell our guest that We were his Host last night and wanted to provide him with sumptuous food, but found no better food than hunger!

There is a tradition by Imam 'Ali (AS) that on The Night of Me'raj, Allah (SWT) said to The Prophet (S):

> O' Ahmad! How sweet and beautiful are the hunger, silence and seclusion? Wisdom, heart's tranquillity, nearness to Me, continuous grief, righteous talks, thriftiness, indifference at the time of ease, and hardships, are the characteristics acquired by My servant as a result of hunger, silence, and seclusion.

Fasting has not only been well established and well researched as a primal source of mental alertness, but the act has also been well ignored. Fasting is considered one of the safest therapeutic agents known today in natural as well as conventional medicine. If only we could use fasting, as a way to increase our mental capability to concentrate, not only would we benefit from the fast, we would also achieve the pleasure of Allah (SWT).

It has been reported by researches in Alternative Medicine that during the process of fasting, the body lives on it's own substance. In its wisdom, and here lies the secret of the extraordinary effectiveness of fasting as a powerful mode of therapy, the body will decompose and burn those cells and tissues which are diseased, damaged or dead and responsible for accumulating toxins in our body and brain.

During fasting, there also occurs the building of new, healthy cells thus bringing your body to a dynamic state. In this process, the cleansing capacity of the eliminative organs - lungs, liver, kidneys and the skin - is greatly increased, and masses of accumulated metabolic wastes and toxins are quickly expelled.

Fasting also offers physiological rest to all the major organs in the body, including the brain, and there is a stabilizing effect on all the vital physiological, nervous and mental functions. Mental powers are thus improved.

STRATEGY 20
THE WORLD AND ITS PLEASURES

Daylami, in *Irshadul Qulub,* quoting The Commander of the Faithful (AS), says that The Prophet of Allah (S) said:

> On The Night of The Me'raj (Ascension), Allah, the Exalted, said: *'0 Ahmad! If a servant performs the Prayer as much as that of the people of the earth and the heaven, and fasts as much as that of the people of the earth and the heaven, and refrains, like the angels, from food, and wears the apparel of a devotee, then I see in his heart a bit of love for this world or for worldly reputation, leadership, celebrity and ornaments, he will not be in an abode in My neighborhood and I will drive My love out of his heart and make it dark until he forgets Me. I will not let him taste the sweetness of My love.'*
> *(Irshad al-Qulub, Volume 1, Page 206)*

According to Ayatullah Ibrahim Amini, one of the greatest obstacle to attaining the state of perfect communion with Allah (SWT) is unwavering attachment to worldly allurements namely, wealth and property, power and position. One's attraction to these things causes the worshipper's attention to these transient things. Therefore, you must cut-off these attractions at all cost, and at all times, so that the heart's presence and attention towards Allah (SWT) becomes easier during Prayer.

There are various interpretations of the term World. What is essential here is to understand the *Disapproved World.* According to al-Majlisi (RA):

The World And Its Pleasures

> All things that prevent men and women from obeying Allah (SWT) and keep them away from His Love, and from seeking the hereafter, is defined as the Disapproved World.
>
> Let it be known to you that which can be deduced from all the verses of The Qur'an and the traditions in this regard, according to our understanding of them, is that the accursed (disapproved) world is the sum total of all those things that prevent man from obeying Allah (SWT) and keep him away from His love and from seeking the Hereafter.

These attractions may include television and radio and their related illicit pleasures; being part of a group that only backbites people and uses foul language; fill oneself with food at all times; being lazy and wasting time on useless matters, and so forth. This is the world one has to refrain from.

The Prophet (S) had this advise to his companion Abu Dhar (RA) with regards to the *Disapproved World,* and reads as follows:

> O' Abu Dhar! The (disapproved) world is cursed! Curse is what's in it except that which seeks Allah's (SWT) pleasure. And there is nothing more hateful to Allah (SWT) than the (disapproved) world. He created it then left it. He didn't look at it and will not look at it until the Final Hour (Judgment Day). And there is nothing more pleasurable to Allah (SWT) than faith in Him and abandoning that which He forbids.
>
> O' Abu Dhar! Blessed are those people who stay far away from this world, and those who await the Hereafter. They take the earth of Allah (SWT) as a carpet, its soil as a pillow and its water as perfume. They read the Book of Allah (SWT) loudly, call Him loudly and they cut themselves off from worldliness.

The *Approved World* is,

> The abode of truth for him who appreciates its truthfulness, a place of safety for him who understands it, a mine of treasures for him who collects provisions from it (for the next world), and a house of instructions for him who draws lessons from it. It is the shrine of worship for those who love Allah (SWT), the house of Prayer for His Angels, the place where the revelations of Allah (SWT) descend, and the market place for those devoted to Him. Herein, they earn His Mercy and herein they acquire Paradise by way of profit.
> *(Imam 'Ali (AS)*

Worshipping Allah more than the compulsory prayers; using the time in this world to do useful things and help people; taking care of one's Family and earning lawful income; refraining from the forbidden acts that displease Allah, and so forth, are acts that will plant healthy seeds in this world for the person to enjoy its fruits in the next. This is the Approved World.

STRATEGY 21
ARRESTING THOUGHTS

Because any individual's mind is filled with thoughts at all times, he is supposed to arrest them, and put a stop on them during Prayer. When a thought comes, a command *stop* is used subconsciously to arrest and halt that thought and the person does not dwell on it. If this strategy is used on all incoming thoughts, then one will assume command and control over his incoming thoughts during Prayer.

In *al-Kafi,* on the authority of al-Baqir (AS), it is stated that he has said:

> When doubts in the Prayer become too frequent, do not give heed to them, and regard the Prayer to be correct. It is hoped that this state would leave you, as Shaytan causes it.
> *(Mustadrak al-Wasa'il, Page 359, Tradition 8)*

In another narrative, al-Baqir (AS) says:

> Do not make it Shaytan's habit to frequent you by breaking your Prayer, as this will stir his greed against you. Shaytan is evil and gets accustomed to what he is habituated to.

Zurarah says that the Imam added:

> That malignant (Shaytan, the Accursed) wants to be obeyed. So, if he is disobeyed he will not come back to you.
> *(Mustadrak al-Wasa'il, Tradition 2)*

Arresting your thoughts can help you overcome nagging worry and doubt, which stands in the way of your attention towards the Almighty. Arresting a thought involves concentrating intensely on the unwanted thought and suddenly stopping and emptying the mind. The command STOP is generally used to interrupt the distracting thought.

One technique is to draw a small dot on a piece of paper and concentrating on it very intensely. Any thought coming to your mind has to be thrown back and ignored. Focusing

more on the dot, and freezing your mind will give rise to unwavering meditation. The more time you involve yourself with thinking about NOTHING, the more attentive and focused you become. This way your brain gets habituated to concentrating for longer periods of time without letting distracting thoughts interrupt your goals. **(FIGURE ONE)**

It is also more effective if you explore and list down all the stressful and negative thoughts that interfere with your Prayer. You should then categorize them in the following four sections - *No interference, Interferes a little, Interferes moderately and Interferes a great deal.* This way, you have a list, and all this needs to be done in writing. It should be understood as an accepted fact that *none of these thoughts are productive during Prayer.* **(FIGURE ONE)**

Arresting your thoughts requires consistent motivation. You should decide now that you really want to eliminate these negative thoughts during Prayer. Once this is done and the thoughts put in writing and categorized as mentioned above, close your eyes and visualize each thought, starting with the one that interferes a little only, and try and solve the problem in your mind. This way, a thought will be eliminated and will have no place in your Prayer. Together, and after some time, you will eliminate all the thoughts including the ones that interfere a great deal.

This exercise should be performed daily so no thought is misplaced or forgotten. Taking care of every thought and why it should distract you is one way of making sure the thought doesn't appear in front of you during your Prayer and distract you from your goal. Some thoughts may return again and again, so you will just have to learn to interrupt them. Like the experts say, *the main effort is to stifle each thought as it begins, and to concentrate on your Prayer. The thoughts will return less and less readily in most cases, and eventually cease to be a problem.*

According to al-Khumeini (RA), in *The Disciplines of Prayer:*

> The principal way of taming it (evil desires) is to act to its contrary. That is, at the time of the Prayer one is to prepare himself to control the imagination during the Prayer and confine it to action, and, as soon as it tries to slip out of his hand, to recapture it. One should carefully watch it in all the actions, recitations, invocations, etc. of the Prayer, observing it so as not to be obstinate.
>
> At the beginning, this seems to be a difficult task. But after a while of strict practice and treatment, it will certainly become tame and obedient. You should not, of course, expect yourself, at the beginning, to be able to control the bird of imagination along the Prayer completely. Actually, this is impossible. Perhaps those who stressed this impossibility had such expectations. The situation requires intention, careful patience and gradual training.

> It is possible that you can first control your imagination during only one-tenth of the Prayer or even less than that, in which you can have the presence of heart. Then, if one pays more attention, and if he feels himself in need of that, he can attain a better result, and can gradually overcome the Shaytan of fancy and the bird of imagination, such that they come under his control in most of the Prayer.

STRATEGY 22
REMEMBRANCE OF DEATH

Great Scholars have advised you to keep busy reminding yourself of death as a way to fear Allah (SWT) and maintain vigilance in your daily Prayer and communication with Allah (SWT). The idea is to develop piety and fear in you and to convince your soul the importance of Prayer.

Allah (SWT) says in Hadith al-Qudsi,

> I am surprised at that person who is sure of death and yet laughs (unnecessarily)!
>
> O' Son of Adam (AS)! Everyday your life is getting shorter but still you do not understand? Each day I send down to you My bounties but you are not thankful to Me about them. You are neither content with My little provision nor are you satisfied with a lot of it.

You can only fear death if you have the knowledge of what will happen to you after death. Indeed, the Infallible Imams (AS) have advised you to constantly think and fear death and that death is a strong weapon for the devout believer to defeat Shaytan and his weak forces. Indeed,

> Frequent remembrance of death decreases one's desires.
> *(Imam 'Ali (AS)*

Unlike some people's belief that the remembrance of death and the Resurrection Day makes one negligent about worldly affairs and material gains, our belief is that the remembrance of death prevents us from heedlessness and chaos. He who is cautious about his performances, big or small, will not commit any wrong act. Apparently, this is one of the most efficient ways to scrutinize your behavior and lead a good and decent life.

This way, you would have a strong and valid reason not to lose your concentration whilst communicating with Allah (SWT).

al-Sadiq (AS) says the following about the effects of remembering death and the Day of Judgment:

> Remembering death suppresses inordinate desires. It uproots the very foundation of negligence and apathy. With the reminding of Allah's promise, it strengthens a man's heart. It softens the hard mentality of a man. It demolishes the banners of inordinate desires and transgression. It suppresses the evil of greediness and makes the world humble before one's eyes.

Allamah Taba Tabai (RA) quotes the following long tradition in his *Exegesis of The Qur'an, al-Mizan:*

> Indeed! When the son of Adam comes to his last day in this world and the first of the next, his property, his children and his actions flash before him. He turns to his property and says, *'By Allah (SWT)! I was covetous of you and avaricious. What have you got for me?'* Then he turns to his children and says, *'By Allah (SWT)! Surely I was your love and I was your protector. What have you in store for me?'* They will say, *'We shall convey you to your grave and bury you in it'.*
>
> Then he turns to his actions and says, *'By Allah (SWT)! I was indifferent to you and you were distasteful to me. What do you have for me?'* So it says, *'I am your companion in your grave as well as on the Day of Gathering when I am presented with you before your Lord'.*
>
> After his death, if he is a friend of Allah (SWT) there comes to him a visitor, the most sweet-scented of all people, of most beautiful appearance and wearing the most adorned apparel, and says to him, *'Rejoice with refreshments from Allah (SWT) and flowers from the Garden of Bounties. You arrived a good arrival'.* Thereupon he says, *'Who are you?'* The visitor then replies, *'I am your good actions. Proceed from the world to The Garden'.* And he recognizes the one who washes his body and earnestly appeals to his carrier to hasten him to the grave.
>
> Then when he enters his grave, two angels come to him and they are the interrogators in the grave, with elegantly dressed hair, writing on earth with their teeth, their voice like roaring thunder and their eyes like streaking lightening. They ask him*; 'Who is your Lord? And who is your Prophet? And what is your Religion?'* And he says, *'Allah (SWT) is my Lord, Muhammad (S) is my Prophet and Islam is my Religion'.* They exclaim, *'May Allah (SWT) confirm you in what you like and are pleased*

> *with'*. And this is the meaning of The Word of Allah (SWT):
> Allah (SWT) confirms those who believe with the sure word in this worldly life and the Hereafter.
> *(Qur'an - Chapter 14, Verse 27)*
>
> They make his grave spacious for him as far as his eyes can see and they open for him a gate to Heaven and say, *'Sleep with joy, the sleep of a fine looking bride'*. And it is the Word of Allah (SWT):
>
> The dwellers of the Garden shall on that Day be in a better abiding place and a better resting-place.
> *(Qur'an - Chapter 25, Verse 24)*
>
> And if he is an enemy of his Lord, then comes to him a visitor, the ugliest of the creatures of Allah (SWT) in attires and the foulest-smelling. And he tells him, *'Welcome to the entertainment of boiling water and roasting in Hell'*. And he (the dead person) recognizes the one who washes his body and earnestly appeals to his carrier (the bier-bearer) to hold him back.
>
> And when he is buried in his grave, the examiners come to him and remove his shroud from him. Then they ask him, *'Who is your Lord? What is your Religion? And who is your Prophet?'* And he says, *'I do not know!'* So they say to him, *'You did not know, nor were you on the right path'*. Then they hit him with an iron-rod, a stroke, which frightens every creature of Allah (SWT) except the Jinn and the men.
>
> Thereafter they open for him a door to the Hell and tell him, *'Sleep in the worst condition'*. So he is squeezed in a narrow space like a shaft in an arrowhead, until his brain comes out from between his nails and flesh. And Allah (SWT) sets on him the serpents of the earth and its scorpions and insects which go on biting him until Allah (SWT) will raise him from his grave, and he will long for the advent of the Hour, because of the trouble in which he finds himself.

It is recommended that a worshipper should think of death before every Prayer. He should imagine that the moment of death has arrived, and that the Prayer is his last one to his Lord and the last few moments to ask for forgiveness and win Divine Mercy. As Imam 'Ali (AS) says:

> Offer compulsory Prayer at its time, like someone who is offering his farewell Prayer, and is afraid that after this he will never have the

> opportunity to offer the Prayer again. If one realizes someone nearby is watching his Prayer, he becomes more careful in offering his Prayer. Beware! You are standing in front of someone Who sees you but you do not see Him!

However, the important thing in this respect is to feel being in need - a mood, which is little felt by us. Our heart does not believe that the source of the happiness in the Hereafter, and the means of a long-lasting life, is the Prayer. We take the Prayer to be an additional burden on our lives. We think it an imposition and an obligation. The love of a thing understands its consequences. We understood its consequence and the heart believes in it, and therefore, we are not in need of any advice or admonition in acquiring it.

But, if we believe in the Hereafter-life and feel we are in need of that life, and regard worship, especially the Prayer, to be the capital for living there, and the source of happiness in that world, we, naturally, will try to do our best to acquire it, and we will not feel any difficulty and fatigue in ourselves; or rather, we will hurry to acquire it with complete eagerness and craving, and endure every hardship and undergo all circumstances for that purpose.
(al-Khumeini, The Disciplines of Prayer)

STRATEGY 23
FIXING YOUR GAZE

The Prophet (S) has said:

> While a person is in the standing position during Prayer, he must be looking down fixing his gaze to the point where he places his forehead while in prostration; while in Ruku' (bending position) the gaze should be between his two feet; while in Qunoot (when he raises his hands reciting the invocation) he should fix the gaze on the palms of his hands, placing them in front of his face; during Sajdah (prostration) his eyes looking at his nose; and while in the final sitting position the gaze to be towards his armpits.

After quoting this tradition, Mir Ahmad Ali (RA) continues:

> Man, while praying should totally forget himself and get so much mindful to Allah that he must be practically away from the world around him, and with the constant practice, and with the due concentration, the gradual earning of this state is not difficult.
> *(S. V. Mir Ahmad 'Ali, Commentary of The Qur'an)*

Attention and concentration problems are directly related to eye movements. When one stands for Prayer, the less his eyes moves, the better. High level of visual efficiency, and to fix your gaze on a particular item will greatly lessen your distraction and allow you to concentrate on the task at hand. According to researchers, attention is greatly enhanced when the eyes align themselves on a fixed point and focus accurately.

Eye teaming is the term used in Optometry to define the ability to point (fixate), focus and move the eyes to the same place at the same time. These visual skills must be maintained effortlessly for prolonged periods if the person is to maintain his concentration in Prayer. Problems occur when extra effort is necessary to produce and maintain singular vision. Further, a person may become drowsy due to excessive fatigue attempting to maintain focus. Performance will then decrease. Headaches, fatigue, blur, eye rubbing, loss of place when reading, tearing, light sensitivity, eyestrain are all common symptoms. The exercises that are mentioned in later sections should help one eliminate such deficits.

Unfortunately, symptoms of eye-teaming and focusing problems often become worse with time. While struggling to overcome these problems during Prayer, one may find ways to avoid and just stop trying to focus and his whole Prayer is filled with distracting thoughts.

STRATEGY 24
AVOIDING THE WHISPERINGS OF SHAYTAN, THE ACCURSED

'Abdullah, the son of Sinan, is reported to have said:

> I mentioned to al-Sadiq (AS) about a man who was troubled by *waswas (whisperings from Shaytan)* in his Wudhu and Prayer, adding that he is a man of intelligence. Thereupon al-Sadiq (AS) said: 'What kind of intelligence has he, when he obeys Shaytan?' I said: 'How does he obey Shaytan?' The Imam replied, 'Ask him regarding its cause and he will tell you that it is a work of Shaytan'.
> *(al-Kulayni, Usul al-Kafi, i, Kitab al-Aql Wal-Jahl, Tradition 10)*

In *al-Kafi* (al-Kulayni (RA) reports) from Zurarah and Abu Basir that they said:

> "We asked him (i.e. al-Baqir or al-Sadiq (AS) about a man who had frequent doubts in his Prayer, to the extent that he wouldn't know how much he has offered and how much remains to be offered. He said, *'He should repeat (the Prayer)'*. We said to him, *'That happens to him a lot and wherever he repeats his doubt also recurs.'* The Imam said, *'(In that case) he should ignore his doubt'*. The Imam then added,

> *'Do not let the evil one get accustomed to haunting him by tempting him to break the Prayer. For Shaytan is wicked and gets accustomed to that which he gets used to. So when one of you does not pay attention to his doubt and does not break his Prayer frequently, and this is done a number of times, the doubt will not recur to him'."*
>
> Then the Imam added, *'The evil one wants to be obeyed, and when he is disobeyed he will not return to any of you.'*

The assurance from the Aimmah (AS) is that if you do not permit Shaytan to enter your souls during Payer, then he has no power to divert your attention during Prayer. He (i.e. The Prophet (S) said, *Shaytan lays his snout, which is like the snout of a pig on the heart of the son of Adam, and instigates him to turn towards the world and that which God has not made lawful. But when a person remembers Allah, Shaytan slinks away.*
(Majma' al-bahrayn, Page 305)

Further, since *Certainty, Conviction, Tranquillity, Steadiness, and Sincerity* of the heart are caused by divine inspiration and angelic suggestions, you ought to pray to the Almighty for His divine deliverance and assistance during Prayer.

al-Sadiq (AS) has said:

> A man came to The Prophet of Allah (S) and said: *'O Prophet of Allah, I complain to you concerning the whisperings from Shaytan that so troubles me during Prayer that I don't know how much of my prayer I have offered.'* The Prophet (S) said to him:
>
> 'When you enter the state of Prayer, strike your left thigh with the forefinger of your right hand, then say: *"In the Name of Allah and by Allah, I put my trust in God, I seek refuge in God, the All-hearing, the All-knowing from Shaytan, the Stoned One."* You will exorcise him (Shaytan) and drive him away'."

STRATEGY 25
EXERCISES TO DEVELOP ATTENTION - MEDITATION

Meditation is one effective way to enhance alertness in Prayer. It is popularly known as the practice of uncritically attempting to focus your attention on one thing at a time. It is important to understand that the heart of meditation in Prayer lies not simply in focusing on one entity to the exclusion of all other thoughts, but rather in the attempt to achieve good focus. The nature of our minds is such that it does not want to stay concentrated. Myriad of thoughts will appear and seemingly interfere with your Prayer. Therefore,

repeating liturgies, contemplating on the nature of Allah (SWT), His creations, and the natural phenomena are effective ways to reap benefits from this kind of exercise.

Contemplation whilst walking and performing our daily chores is another alternative. al-Sadiq (AS) has said:

> If you are intelligent, then you should be of firm resolution and sincere intention before you set out for any place, for surely the self's nature is to overstep the bounds and encroach on the forbidden. You should reflect when you walk, and take note of the wonders of God's work wherever you go.
>
> Lower your gaze from whatever is inappropriate to faith, and remember Allah (SWT) frequently. Those places where, and in connection with which, Allah (SWT) is mentioned will testify to that before Allah (SWT) on The Day of Judgment, and will ask forgiveness for those people so that Allah (SWT) will let them enter the Garden.

Gradually this meditation becomes stiffer and higher, and sometimes mean concentration on one's silence, or on one's self or on a higher truth, i.e. the names and the attributes of Allah (SWT). The following are the different types of meditation and relaxation exercises that will create in you mental alertness in Prayer.

<u>ONE - Focused Meditation Exercise</u>

Sit with a pencil and paper. Allow your eyes to rest gently on the blank paper. Pay attention to what you are experiencing. When something comes to mind (a thought, an emotion, a memory, a sensation), follow this direction very carefully:

Write down just enough that, if you wanted to, you could remember that what you just experienced. Then let that experience go, and your eyes rest gently on the paper. This is important: Do not think about what you wrote. Do not analyze it. Do not resist it or fight it or try to change it. Do not connect it with anything. Simply accept it, note it, and let it go. To keep yourself from being drawn into the words on the paper, and the thoughts behind them, rotate the page around 15 degrees after writing, so that as you write more, the words appear on the page as a roughly circular series of jottings.

If a thought recurs, just put a check by it. If it keeps recurring, sit with it a while to make certain you have noted enough about this experience so that you could fully remember it if you wanted to. Then let it go and return to the open-ended focus on your present awareness.

Continue doing this for 10 minutes.

When you have the time, continue the exercise as long as the thoughts keep coming. Then continue the open focus for about 5 minutes after the last thoughts came to you.
(FIGURE TWO)

Another form of this exercise is as follows:

An ancient technique is to use a candle as a visual focus. In that technique, you meditate with your eyes open. The candle is your focus. Whatever you think is OK. Whatever you imagine or feel is OK. Just keep bringing your focus back to the candle.

Do not JUDGE your meditation. Whatever happens is okay. Keep practicing at least ten minutes a day, preferably in the early morning when there are very few distractions. After a while, when you sit down for these two exercises, nothing should come to your mind that can significantly distract you. Your mind will be as blank as ever. Exercise two should be much easier for you – give it a try.

TWO - Blank Meditation Exercise

A blank form of Meditation equals a *frozen* mind (not even one thought should be entertained; one should play dead and should not think of anything - a blank mind throughout the exercise) and this act may be practiced for five to ten minutes each day, and within a few weeks, you may notice that your intuition and level of concentration on any given task will begin to increase.

THREE - Breathing Meditation Exercise

Quoted by al-Mutahhari (RA), The Prophet (S) said:

> True worship does not lie in engaging oneself constantly in supererogatory Prayer or in fasting frequently, but in contemplation of the creation and seeking to know the Creator through His works.

Indeed, if one were to lie down, eyes closed, all muscles relaxed, practicing very slow and deep breathing, and contemplate on the Creation and workings of Allah (SWT), this act would be considered not only an effective way to develop one's attention, but a form of worship. However, one should not entertain any other thought during this 5 - 10 minute exercise, except that which concerns the Creation of Allah (SWT).

During this process, you would learn to breathe slow and deep, provide enough oxygen to furnish and satisfy the brain and other major parts of your body.

Respiration, Stages of Breathing

A Note on RESPIRATION

To continue with breathing, normal respiration begins with a slow calm exhalation carried out by relaxing the muscles. The chest is depressed by its own weight, expelling air. This exhalation must be as silent as every other action involved in breathing (you should not hear yourself breathe), and because it is silent, it will also be slow. At the end of the expiration the abdominal muscles help the lungs to empty to their fullest extent, by means of a contraction, which expels the last traces of polluted air. The spongy make-up of the lungs does not allow them to be emptied completely, so there is always a residue of impure air in the lungs. We must attempt to minimize this residue because with the fresh air provided by inhalation it makes up the actual air we breathe. The more complete the exhalation, the greater the quantity of fresh air enters the lungs, and the purer the air gets into the lungs.

The Stages of Breathing - Meditation Exercise

This method works best while you are lying on your back. Here is a brief description of the various phases:

1) Empty the lungs entirely by breathing out all the air in your lungs
2) Slowly lower the diaphragm allowing air into the lungs. The abdomen swells filling the bottom of the lungs with air.
3) Expand the ribs without straining.
4) Allow the lungs to completely fill by raising the collarbone.

Throughout this procedure, the air should enter in a continuous flow, without gasping. It is essential to breathe silently! It is of great importance to concentrate the mind entirely upon the action of breathing in the first few minutes before filling your mind with thoughts concerning the Creation of Allah (SWT).

Inhalation, like exhalation, must be silent, slow, continuous and easy. Do not blow yourself up like a balloon! Breathe easily without straining. Remember that the ideal respiration is deep, slow, silent, and easy.

As we all know, Oxygen plays a vital role in the circulatory and respiratory systems. As you breathe, oxygen that is inhaled purifies your blood by removing poisonous waste products circulating throughout your blood. Irregular breathing will hamper this purification process and cause waste products to remain in circulation. Digestion will then become irregular, leaving tissues and organs undernourished. Improper oxygen consumption will thus ultimately lead to fatigue and heightened anxiety states.

Irregular breathing elicited during stressful situations not only makes it hard to cope with them but also contributes to a general deterioration of health. By careful control of your breathing pattern, you not only rejuvenate your system, but you also counter the unhealthy effects of stress. Although this exercise can be practiced in a variety of postures, the following is recommended for beginners, at night before sleeping:



Lie down on a blanket or rug on the floor. Bend your knees and move your feet about eight inches apart, with your toes turned outward slightly. Make sure your back is straight. Place one hand on your abdomen and one hand on your chest. Inhale slowly and deeply through your nose into your abdomen to push up your hand as much as feels comfortable. Your chest should move only a little and only with your abdomen.

Continue until your breathing becomes rhythmic and comfortable. Now, inhale through your nose and exhale through your mouth, making a quiet, breezy sound as you gently breathe out. Your mouth, tongue and jaw will be relaxed. Take long, slow, deep breaths raising and lowering your abdomen. Hear the sound and feel the texture of breathing as you become more and more relaxed.

When you first begin this technique, do it for five minutes. When you become more comfortable with it, you may extend it up to 20 minutes. Upon ending a session, stay still for a few minutes and try to keep the entire body relaxed.

The purpose of this technique is to develop a good, relaxing breathing method and developing and maintaining attention during any given task, in particular the Five Daily Prayer.

CONCLUSION

al-Khumeini's comments on the finality of Prayer fits best the conclusion of this short book on Prayer. We anticipate the readers to read and study this book to reap the benefits, and we hope the exercises and the 30-day workout has been useful.

> As you utter the takbir (ALLAHU AKBAR), regard small all creatures in relation to the greatness of Allah (SWT). Examine your heart during the Prayer. If you tasted the sweetness of the Prayer, and if in your soul you felt pleased by it, and your heart enjoyed the supplication to Allah (SWT) and conversing with Him, stow that Allah (SWT) has approved your takbirs. Otherwise, without feeling pleasure in supplication, and being deprived of tasting the sweetness of worship, you should know that Allah (SWT) has denied you and dismissed you from His Threshold.'
> *(Mustadrak al-Wasa'il, The Book of Prayer, Chapter on The Acts of Prayer, Chapter 2, Tradition 9)*

My God, grant me the utmost absorption in You and illuminate the vision of our hearts with the light of Your Vision, until the sight of the hearts can penetrate the curtains of light and reach the source of Greatness and until our spirits get anchored to the threshold of Your Sanctity.

(Munajat-e Sha'baniyyah – Mafatih al-Jinaan)

Learning to Focus and Concentrate on your Daily Prayer

A COMPLETE
30-DAY WORKBOOK

CONCENTRATION IN PRAYER

30-day Workbook

INTRODUCTION

The ability to focus attention with sufficient intensity to accomplish the goal five times a day is a skill that needs to be developed. Those people who have learned how to concentrate and can apply their minds to a particular task whenever necessary appreciate this fact. Unfortunately, it is more difficult to concentrate on the act of Prayer simply because it is a repetitious act of worship. As a result, the effort required to fulfill this task is greatly increased.

The 25 strategies for concentrating in Prayer discussed in the Prayer booklet can be further divided into three categories: those that have to be well analyzed and understood; those that have to be applied before the Prayer, and the remainder applied after you complete your Prayer.

This workbook includes a 30-day exercise to significantly increase your concentration in Prayer and solve the problem of distracting thoughts and sounds.

CATEGORY ONE
KNOWLEDGE AND AWARENESS

1 Have I understood and convinced myself of Allah (SWT)'s presence?

2 Am I aware that I am standing in front of Allah (SWT)?

3 Do I understand what I recite?

4 Am I making the correct pronunciations in Arabic?

5 Am I aware and practicing the Rules for Reciting The Qur'an?

6 Have I understood the main reasons behind The Five Daily Prayer?

7 Do I have the motivation and energy to sustain my attention?

8 Am I confident enough that Allah (SWT) is with me and that He is assisting me in my Prayer?

9 Have I refrained myself from heedless conversations?

10 Do I remember death often?

11 Do I fast often enough to increase my mental clarity?

12 Have I convinced myself that each Prayer I recite maybe my last Prayer?

If you have answered YES to 6 of the 12 questions above, you may proceed with the workout. However, even one negative answer means that you have to go back and invest more time and reflection in that particular aspect. Otherwise, the workout will not be very effective.

CATEGORY TWO
SETTING THE SCENE OF PRAYER

1 Am I satisfied with the environment, the surroundings?

2 Am I wearing pure, clean, preferably white clothes?

3 Am I clean, pure and scented?

4 Am I confident enough in alternating recitations?

5 Am I in a relaxed and alert state of mind?

6 Have I been moderate in my food intake?

7 Am I grief-stricken and submissive?

8 Have I satisfied my hunger and thirst, as well as other needs?

9 Have I separated myself from the disapproved world and all its attractions?

10 Am I confident enough in arresting distracting thoughts in Prayer?

11 Have I connected my Ablution to the recitation of Adhan?

12 Have I connected my recitation of Adhan and Iqamah to the Takbeer in Prayer?

If you have answered YES to 6 of the 12 questions above, you may proceed with the workout. However, even one negative answer means that you have to go back and invest more time and reflection in that particular aspect. Otherwise, the workout will not be very effective.

This exercise works effectively with FOUR units of Prayer, employed only once a day, AFTER evening ('Isha) Prayer. Your intention for this four unit Prayer should be for any lapsed Prayer (Qadha).

In this workout, you will employ a *Trigger Mechanism* and pay the *Debts* you are obligated to. There are TWO types of debts: one, which has to be paid during your Prayer and the other, after you complete your Prayer. You have to work and complete the whole program as laid out.
Using a personal Trigger Mechanism will provide you a signal to get ready for a moment of concentration, while you complete the obligatory task assigned to you. The detail of this workout is described below and has to be employed for a full 30 days, without a break. *Answering a complete YES to 6 out of the 12 items (in both categories) is also a requirement for the 30 days.*

WORKOUT—30 DAYS

Your first Trigger Mechanism is the **Takbeer** (Allahu Akbar) that you pronounce before you start your Prayer. This is the signal to your mind that you are now standing in front of your Lord, the Most Powerful in this Universe. You have to appreciate the fact that you are standing in front of Allah (SWT) and He is watching over you.

al-Sadiq (AS) is quoted to have said:

> When you say, *Allahu Akbar,* slight whatever is there between the high (heaven) and the earth, regarding it below His Majesty, because if Allah (SWT) looked into the heart of the servant while telling the Takbir, and saw therein something contradicting his Takbir. He would say, *'O' You Liar! Are you deceiving Me? By My Might and My Majesty, I will deprive you of (tasting) the sweetness of remembering Me, and I will exclude you from My proximity and from getting pleasure through your supplication'.*
> *(Mustadarak al-Wasa'il, Chapter 2, Tradition 9)*

You promise to recite **5 SUBHANALLAH** each time you have a significant distraction and you entertain the distracting thought for a few seconds. This debt has to be repeated as many times you get distracted and whenever you can pay the debt. All debts are to be paid ONLY in the state of Ruku' (bending) or Sajdah (prostration).

For example, while reciting Surah al-Hamd, you get significantly distracted twice, then on your next Ruku', you will pay your debt of **10 SUBHANALLAH** first and then continue with the recitation normally assigned for Ruku'. If the distracting thought happens to occur whilst in Tashahhud or Salaam, then you will pay your debt as soon as you complete your Prayer.

CAUTION
The above debt and **SUBHANALLAH** forms part of your prayer and you should have that intention before and during your practice prayer. The debt should be paid ONLY in the state of bending (Ruku') or prostration (Sajdah), the additions will otherwise make you Prayer NULL and VOID, even though your practice Prayer is lapsed and not a compulsory Prayer.

In any case, you have 4 Ruku' (bending) and 8 Sujood (prostration) in the four unit Prayer to pay the debts you owe. Do not concentrate on how many times you get significantly distracted as you will be aware of this fact when it happens, and you will pay your debt in your next Ruku' or Sajdah.

You will generalize this activity throughout your 4-unit Prayer. After you complete your act of worship, you will recall how many times you had to repeat the **5 SUBHANALLAH** and how many debts you had to pay. Now you promise to recite **5 ASTAGHFIRULLAHA RABBI WA ATUBU ILAYH** for every debt. If you had paid 10 debts during your Prayer that means you recite **50 ASTAGHFIRULLAHA RABBI WA ATUBU ILAYH** as soon as you complete your Prayer.

You will now record in your chart the number of times you had to pay the debt during your Prayer, 5 or 10, may be 3.

This is the end of the WORKOUT.

CAUTION

The above exercise is ONLY a workout to increase your concentration and plays no role in your daily obligatory Prayer. Also, this workout is to be practiced passively during the Prayer and only active after your Prayer - meaning that if you concentrate too much on the debt, then you might distract yourself from the major objective.

CATEGORY THREE
SELF-ASSESSMENT

As soon as you complete your workout, the four units Prayer, you will rate the following in your personal chart – concentration, energy and motivation.

Concentration – your ability to focus and attend to Prayer.
Energy – strength or vigor; interest to perform Prayer
Motivation – an intervening process or an internal state that impels or drives you to Prayer. An energizer of behavior.
The number 10 is excellent and the best score you can give to yourself, zero is the least, the number 5 is average.

Rate you level of **CONCENTRATION** during the Prayer

1 5 10
____

Rate your level of **ENERGY** during the Prayer

1 5 10
____

Rate your level of **MOTIVATION** during the Prayer

1 5 10
____

Write down all the distracting thoughts that *significantly* affected you and how many times they recurred:

How many times you were significantly deviated in your Prayer?

Did you pay all your debts to Allah (SWT) as you promised (during and after your practice Prayer)? **(FIGURE FOUR).** You may now grade your charts accordingly. You have 4 Charts at the end of this WORKOUT - *CONCENTRATION, ENERGY, MOTIVATION* and *DEBTS.* **(FIGURE FIVE)**

CATEGORY FOUR

EXERCISES AND MENTAL WORKOUT BEFORE SLEEPING AT NIGHT
30 DAYS – 15 MINUTES EACH NIGHT

Spend the first 3-5 minutes contemplating on the distracting thoughts that significantly distracted you from achieving a high level of concentration in your Prayer. Work them through and convince yourself that none of those thoughts play an important role in Prayer and neither are the thoughts solvable during Prayer.

Spend the next 3-5 minutes contemplating on the creation of Allah (SWT) and make sure you are not distracted by any thought - you can spend this time reading The Qur'an, recite invocations, or read a book, whatever suits you. You should not exceed 5 minutes.

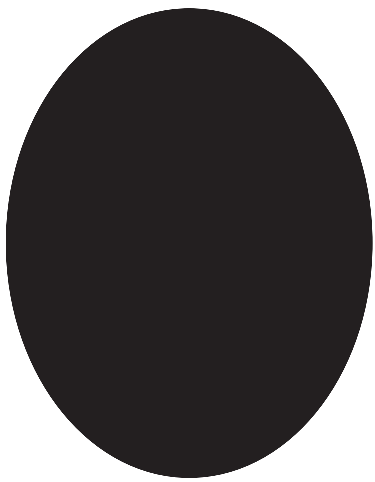
Spend the last 3-5 minutes doing a meditation exercise. You can employ any other similar technique you are aware of. However, make sure it has a deep breathing element in it.

You may want to review your chart at this time.

Congratulations, you are done with Day 1 of this workout. Similarly, you may proceed with Day 2 until you reach Day 30. After 30 days, you may review your Charts and see if you have made any kind of improvement. Your goal is to get to a 10 with Concentration, Energy and Motivation, and a 0-2 with Debts.

For assistance on this workout, please contact the author at jameelyk@aol.com

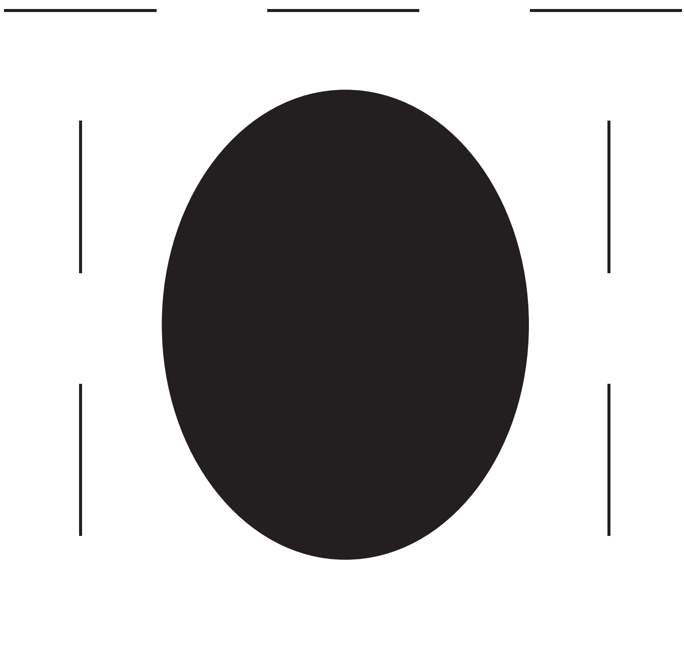
FIGURE ONE



No interference
Interferes a little
Interferes moderately
Interferes a great deal

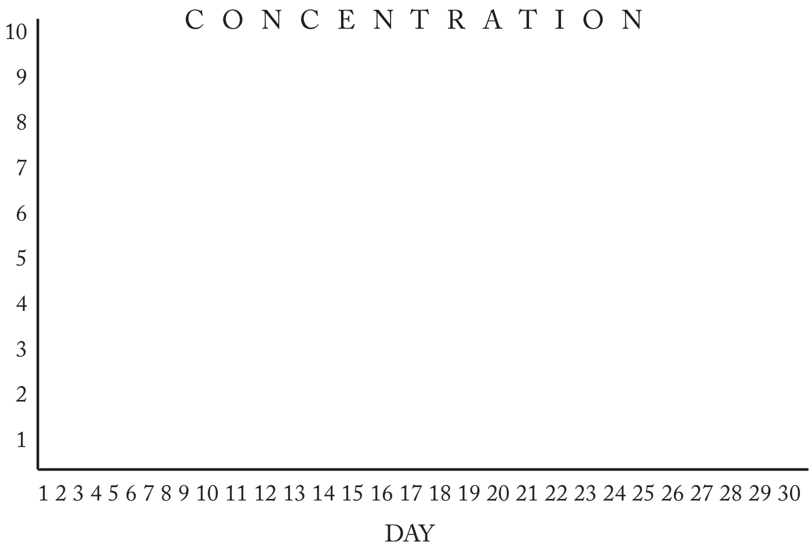
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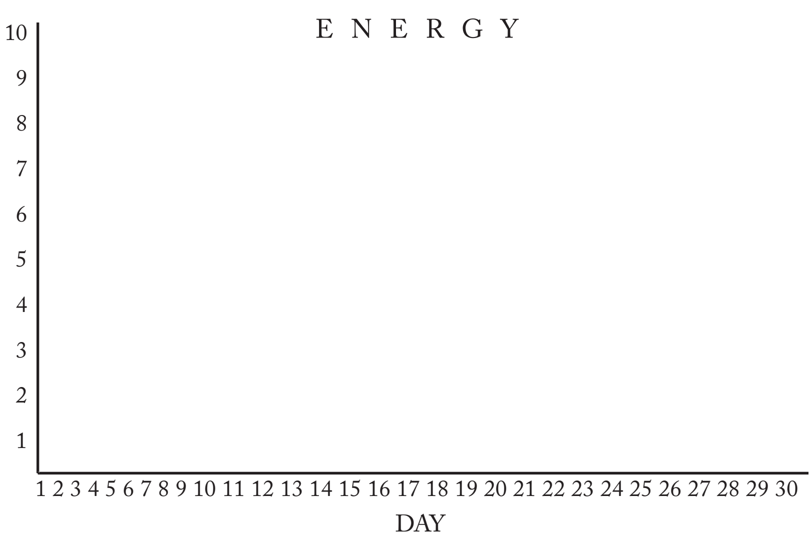
FIGURE TWO



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FIGURE THREE





M O T I V A T I O N

10
9
8
7
6
5
4
3
2
1

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30

DAY

D E B T S

10
9
8
7
6
5
4
3
2
1

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30

DAY

FIGURE FOUR

Rate your level of **<u>CONCENTRATION</u>** during the Prayer

1 5 10

Rate your level of **<u>ENERGY</u>** during the Prayer

1 5 10

Rate your level of **<u>MOTIVATION</u>** during the Prayer

1 5 10

Write down all the distracting thoughts that significanty affected you and how many times they recurred:

1)

2)

3)

How many times were you significantly deviated in your Prayer?
Did you pay all your debts to Allah as you promised (during and after your Practice Prayer)?

Make 30 copies of this page